ŽIŽEK
and
MEDIA
STUDIES
A READER

Edited by
MATTHEW FLISFEDER & LOUIS-PAUL WILLIS

Žižek and Media Studies

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List of Previous Publications

*The Symbolic, The Sublime, and
Slavoj Žižek's Theory of Film,* by Matthew Flisfeder

Matthew Flisfeder would like to dedicate this book to his parents,
Janice and Avrum, for their continued love and support

Louis-Paul Willis would like to dedicate this book to the
memory of his father,
Stephen C. Willis, who has provided academic inspiration

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Introduction

Žižek and Media Studies, Beyond Lacan

By Matthew Flisfeder and Louis-Paul Willis

At the beginning of *The Metastases of Enjoyment* (1994), Slavoj Žižek recounts a story of presenting a lecture on Hitchcock at an American university in 1992. At the end of his lecture, an outraged member of the audience stood up and asked: "How can you talk about such a trifling subject when your ex-country [Yugoslavia] is dying in flames?" To this indignant admonishment, Žižek responded with the following: "How is it that you in the USA *can* talk about Hitchcock?" His point, of course, was that there would be nothing "traumatic" for him to have behaved in a manner that was more befitting of a victim of violence, "testifying to the horrible events in [his] own country." However, for his interlocutor, it was, according to Žižek, almost as if he had violated some kind of invisible prohibition simply by behaving like an average American cultural studies intellectual who wants to do nothing more than simply talk about Hitchcock and popular culture. Nevertheless, perhaps there is something significant about Žižek's presentation on Hitchcock: in a way, doesn't the interest in Hitchcock—a master of the image—touch upon the very ground of the Real in a world that gathers its sense of "reality" by way of mass mediated images?

Žižek's experience with this reproach demonstrates, for him, something about the way in which the Western gaze operates in its global approach to the reality of political conflict: "reporters compete with each other on who will find a more repulsive scene—lacerated child bodies, raped women, starved prisoners: all this is good fodder for hungry Western eyes. However, the media are far more sparing of words apropos of how the residents of Sarajevo desperately endeavor to maintain the appearance of normal life." What is truly unbearable for the Western gaze, according to Žižek, is the fact that everyday lived reality is still operative, functional, even (or especially) in war torn parts of the

world—as the only way to really cope with the trauma. Perhaps, in this sense, talking about Hitchcock is a political act that takes force by penetrating the Symbolic structures that actually inform the life world of the subject coping with a traumatic rupture. Rather than address the media image of the war "out there," addressing a media image that admits itself as such is the only way to truly bring dignity to the Real behind the veil of Symbolic, mediated "reality."[1]

*   *   *

More recently, in an online video, *Living in the End Times*, based on his book of the same title (2010), Žižek is seen commenting on some of the key political, social, and cultural questions that plague us today, following the first decade of the twenty-first century. In the video, Žižek is surrounded by video screens that are presenting images relating to the topics being addressed: the global financial crisis, war, ecological catastrophe, the "crisis" of democracy, and so on. What Žižek is responding to here are, in many ways, *the* problems that are more appropriately labeled as "media events." That is, the entire framework in which these topics are broached has to do, primarily, with the way that they have been framed in the context of the mainstream media in Europe and the United States. In this sense, too, the "images" with which Žižek is dealing traverse a line between "reality" and ideology.

Throughout the video, Žižek is followed by a camera, and at times it is his own image that is presented on the video screens that surround him. In the opening moments of the video, Žižek, declares (echoing the thoughts of Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard) that he likes "this idea that you will bombard me with images of reality; images *are* the true reality, today, I claim. We cannot simply say 'discard the images and you see reality.' If we discard the images, nothing remains, just some pure abstraction. Images *are* reality for us, today." What, then, can we say about the way in which Žižek, himself, has been elevated to the level of "image?" On the one hand, there is something about Žižek— something about the style through which he makes palpable the engagement of critical theory with popular culture; however, on the other hand, labels such as "the Elvis of cultural theory" or "the Marx brother," in many ways operate as a way of obfuscating his true impact upon critical thought, today. Turning Žižek into an image is, perhaps, the best way to avoid taking him seriously. Nevertheless, some might still turn back towards Žižek, complicating matters with the question, "Why do you continue to make yourself into an image for popular culture? Why not simply resist this tendency?" There is something about this kind of claim that pertains to the liberal democratic version of ideology critique—that demystification is the best way to debunk a claim in ideology. For the latter, ideology is simply a matter of a false truth. For Žižek, however, truth itself has the structure of a fiction.

Žižek is confronted with this very question in a recent interview on BBC's *The Culture Show*: has he, himself, not produced the very image that works

counter to his serious "message?" Žižek responds by pointing out that, within the existing coordinates of ideology today—what Debord referred to as the "society of the spectacle"—images are, in fact, needed in order to counter the dominant ideology. Images of a certain variety are needed in order to "awaken people," as Žižek puts it. There is a price to be paid, he claims, by the requirement of being "taken seriously": to be taken seriously often means being integrated, in some way, into the elitist academic discourse that rarely enters the everyday terrain of the popular classes. It is, in this sense, that we can start to think about Žižek's own media image as the star of two popular documentaries on cinema, *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (2006) and its sequel, *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (2012), directed by Sophie Fiennes; he is also the star of a documentary, *Žižek!* (2005), directed by Astra Taylor, of which he is the object under the microscope, and he has also appeared in another documentary directed by Taylor, *Examined Life* (2009).

Throughout the film, *Living in the End Times*, Žižek is "attacked" with a barrage of troubling questions from an invisible voice that protrudes from some absent space, in the darkness behind the video screens (perhaps). How might we conceive the setting in which Žižek is speaking here? Those well-versed in psychoanalytic theory might recognize this voice as that of the analyst, who remains out of sight during the psychoanalytic session, sitting behind the analysand, bombarding him with difficult, perhaps traumatic questions. Here, the tables are turned on Žižek, for it is he who often assumes the role of analyst, troubling his readers to undermine their own supplemental fantasies—the frame through which we all engage with the everyday life world of mass-mediated "reality."

*   *   *

There is an ambiguous relationship, then, between Žižek and the media. On the one hand, Žižek's object of inquiry is less the media, film, or culture—his work pertains more to questions about ideology and subjectivity, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Hegelian dialectics, and German Idealism more generally. However, on the other hand, questions about film, media, and culture always manage to find their way into Žižek's voluminous writings, lectures, and films. Perhaps it is possible to claim that Žižek approaches media and culture in order to make the complex questions that he asks apropos ideology and subjectivity more tangible; but, in a world that is constituted primarily by images, media, and ideology form the front and back of the same arena of the Symbolic order that informs our daily lives. It becomes impossible, in this context, to deal with questions about ideology and subjectivity without taking the media into consideration. The media and ideology are two versions of the same problematic. It is in this sense that this book seeks to address the relationship between Žižek and media studies.

It is not surprising that media scholars have taken up much of Žižek's work in recent years. Although Žižek does often address questions about popular

culture, cinema, and cyberspace, he does not address the media quite as specifically in his own texts as do many contemporary critical media scholars who take up his thought. Nevertheless, since Žižek's primary field of address is grounded in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, and since there is already a tradition of Lacanian film, media, and cultural scholarship, it is easy to understand why media scholars, today, have taken an interest in Žižek's work.

Early Lacanian Film Theory

The use of Lacanian psychoanalysis in the fields of contemporary cultural and media studies results from its initial influence within 1970s film theory—often referred to as Screen theory due to the many ground-breaking reflections published in the British Film Studies journal of the same name. During the early to mid-1970s, many film scholars were drawn in by the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan, whose annual seminar aimed at rereading Freud through various influences, mostly related to structuralism (Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, etc.). The ensuing Lacanian "trend" within film studies produced a wide range of theorization, aiming to conceptualize the spectator's relationship with the film as well as with the screen. Film was conceived as an "ideological apparatus" that produced an "imaginary signifier"; the spectator was consequently conceived as submitting to two levels of identification ("primary" and "secondary") through which s/he was posed as an "all-perceiving" subject; this same theoretical spectator was concurrently considered, by emerging feminist film scholars, as possessing a "male gaze," driven by a blatant voyeurism that in turn provided an objectifying "visual pleasure." In sum, Lacanian psychoanalysis played a central role within film—and eventually cultural/media—studies for two decades.

In Lacanian terms, Screen theorists were mostly preoccupied with the Imaginary dimension of film spectatorship; they viewed the cinematic apparatus as a visual snare operating in order to render invisible the Symbolic (and ideological) structure that underlies social and cultural existence. At the heart of Screen theory's conceptual structure we find Lacan's theorization of the mirror stage, which dates from an early period in his career. Lacan's mirror-stage essay suggests that in perceiving itself in the mirror, the child *imagines* a mastery it does not yet possess over itself; Screen theorists relied heavily on this Imaginary dimension of looking in order to formulate their various analyses of film—and eventually media—spectatorship. This led them to conceive the "filmic gaze" as analogous to the child's appropriation of the specular image, based on an illusion of mastery. Certain pivotal texts, such as Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and narrative cinema," or Christian Metz's *The Imaginary Signifier*, became the cornerstones of entire theoretical edifices built around the notion of an imaginary gaze and its ideological implications.

However, this approach eventually became limiting. After David Bordwell's introduction of cognitivist film theory as the empirical alternative

to Lacanian-influenced approaches, Bordwell and Noël Carroll's anthology, *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, published in the mid-1990s, struck what many consider to be the final blow to Screen theory. But most importantly, as it is well known today, this early version of psychoanalytic film theory drew on certain misconceptions of Lacanian notions such as the gaze, desire, fantasy, and subjectivity; it also did not consider the third realm of existence in Lacan's model—the Real, that is, the traumatic point at which Symbolic reality fails. In this context, Žižek's early English writings played a central role in identifying these misconceptions, spawning a new wave of Lacanian-influenced film, cultural, and media studies—all despite the fact that this specific approach had been declared deceased by "post-Theorists" in the mid-90s.[2]

Not only did 1970s psychoanalytic film theory neglect the importance of the Real, it also articulated a problematical interpretation of Lacan's R.S.I. topology. For instance, Lacan's three registers were often conceived as "stages" or "phases" that the subject must "traverse"—as such, the Imaginary is described as a "moment" defined by the mirror-stage, instead of a realm defined by the individual's relation to image and ideal. This, of course, leads to a Lacanian model that not only left the Real aside, but ignored the radicalness inherent to its coexistence with the Imaginary and—especially—the Symbolic.

In a 1989 article, "The Undergrowth of Enjoyment," Žižek engages with the Lacanian misconceptions that founded 1970s psychoanalytic and feminist film theory, arguing that "[t]he Lacan that served as a point of reference for these theories . . . was the Lacan before the break."[3] The "break" Žižek is referring to here is the increased focus on the Real and the correlated conceptual shifts "from the dialectics of desire to the inertia of enjoyment (*jouissance*), from the symptom as coded message to the *sinthome* as a letter permeated with enjoyment, from the 'unconscious structured like a language' to the Thing in its heart."[4] With the publication of *The Sublime Object of Ideology* that same year, in which he further deploys his re-examination of Lacanian concepts as well as their implications on the analysis of film, media, and various cultural/ideological phenomena, Žižek laid much of the groundwork on which contemporary theorists have developed a properly Lacanian approach to cultural manifestations. Considering these early English writings by Žižek at the end of the 1980s, as well as a 1989 article by Joan Copjec, "The Orthopsychic Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan"—and its subsequent inclusion in her book, *Read My Desire* (1994)—that also examines Lacanian misconceptions within 1970s screen theory, it appears somewhat surprising how the *Post-Theory* charge against Lacanian film theory perpetuated the misconceptions that had been previously identified.[5] As Todd McGowan puts it, "the *Post-Theory* critique of Lacanian Film Theory has not really addressed a properly *Lacanian* film theory."[6] While Žižek remains first and foremost a cultural philosopher, it is no overstatement to claim that he played a pivotal role in rearticulating a truly Lacanian paradigm within film and media studies.

Overall, by centering his theoretical contributions around the Real and its related concepts—such as the gaze, desire and its impossible object/cause (*objet a*), fantasy, and *jouissance*—Žižek has played a pivotal role in defining contemporary issues in film, media, cultural, and even political studies. While psychoanalysis is often dismissed as nonempirical and inductive within mainstream and formalist film scholarship, and while film and media psychoanalysis is frequently deemed a "perversion" of the writings of Freud and Lacan, Žižek pertinently reminds us that "[f]or Lacan, psychoanalysis at its most fundamental is not a theory and technique of treating psychic disturbances, but a theory and practice that confronts individuals with the most radical dimension of human existence"[7]—this radical dimension being linked to the Lacanian Real and its emergence in socially and culturally mediated discourses. With this rereading of Lacan in mind, Žižek opens the door to the rethinking of many theoretical paradigms that built upon Screen theory's initial use of psychoanalysis.

Žižek and Film/Media Studies

Žižek's reliance on Lacanian psychoanalysis, in conjunction with his use of Marxism and Hegelian dialectics, allows him to produce an incredibly polyvalent and highly radical cultural and political theory. Because the texts included in this book focus mostly on his reinterpretation of crucial Lacanian concepts, it appears appropriate to summarize the central notions that Žižek relies on in his philosophical project. Of course, when it comes to film and media studies, one of Žižek's main insights is his use of Lacan's *objet a*, the evanescent object-cause of desire that the subject imaginarily gives up in order to integrate into the Symbolic network of intersubjectivity. Indeed, *objet a* occupies a preponderant role in Žižek's oeuvre, as he provides countless descriptions and definitions of the object-cause, notably defining it as "the pure lack, the void around which desire turns and which, as such, causes the desire, *and* the imaginary element which conceals this void, renders it visible by filling it out."[8]

As early as 1989, Žižek uses *objet a* to articulate his Marxist critique of ideology, wondering if "the paradoxical topology of the movement of capital [is not] precisely that of the Lacanian *objet petit a*, of the leftover which embodies the fundamental, constitutive lack."[9] In the study of visual media, this surplus is most evidently embodied in the gaze, a Lacanian concept that was, as we have already surmised, decidedly misconceived in Screen theory. When considering the "complete" Lacanian topology, the *objet a* represents a nonsymbolizable surplus that holds the potential for the traumatic encounter with the Real. As such, Copjec's aforementioned emphasis on Lacan's Seminar XI is crucial, as it is within this seminar that Lacan describes the gaze as the *objet a* with the visual field.

Many film scholars have followed Žižek's and Copjec's initial insights regarding the cinematic gaze in its truly Lacanian conception. Elizabeth Cowie has aptly noted how the positing of the gaze as an *objet a* radically changes the way psychoanalytic and feminist film theory must approach the

notion of a Lacanian spectator. By reminding us how "[t]he gaze is not the look, for to look is merely to see whereas the gaze is to be posed by oneself in a field of vision,"[10] Cowie also emphasizes the importance of looking beyond Lacan's early writings and teachings.[11] In this regard, any visual pleasure resulting from film spectatorship cannot be linked to the positioning of the spectator as an all-perceiving subject; because "[t]he gaze is the inverse of the omnipotent look, which is the empirical function of the eye,"[12] a redefining of desire within film spectatorship has been deployed following Žižek's insights on the importance of the *objet a*.

Steering away from the traditional Foucauldian idea of the desire for mastery, the post-Žižek approach to Lacanian film theory, in considering the gaze as *objet a*, necessarily encompasses the idea of *jouissance*. As Todd McGowan notes, "[t]he gaze triggers the subject's desire because it appears to hold the key not to the achievement of self-completion or wholeness but to the disappearance of self in the experience of enjoyment."[13] While the desire for mastery is not a notion that is entirely rejected, McGowan argues that this specific desire is an "attempt to short-circuit the path of desire in order to derive satisfaction from the *objet petit a* without experiencing the trauma that accompanies that satisfaction."[14] With this redefinition in mind, one might ask how contemporary film and media studies relate to the idea of visual pleasure in this post-Žižek account of Lacanian cultural psychoanalysis.[15]

The answer, of course, resides within fantasy and its significant role in any given ideological discourse. One can hardly overemphasize the capital role fantasy plays both within social and media discourses, and their analysis through a Lacanian approach. French Lacanian psychoanalyst Didier Castanet goes so far as to assert that although neither Freud nor Lacan considered fantasy as a fundamental psychoanalytic concept, it nevertheless should be viewed as such given the role it plays within the cure.[16] One could easily transpose this logic into Žižekian terms, as he relies on fantasy's pivotal role within psychoanalysis to deploy his own—albeit highly Lacanian—approach to questions pertaining to ideology and its persistent resorting to cultural and media discourses. While the subject is defined through its desire, the object-cause of the subject's desire (the *objet a*) remains "the reef, the obstacle which interrupts the closed circuit of the 'pleasure principle' and derails its balanced movement."[17] Fantasy covers up the void left by the evanescence of the *objet a*; it stages an Imaginary relation between subject and object. Lacan illustrates this relation between subject and object, as it is mediated by fantasy, through the formula $\$\lozenge a$ where $\$$ represents the split subject of the Symbolic, *a* represents the *objet a*, and $\lozenge$ represents the "tying of Symbolic ($\$$), Imaginary (*a*) and Real as it is operated by fantasy."[18] In Žižek's words, "[f]antasy conceals the fact that the Other, the Symbolic order, is structured around some traumatic impossibility, around something which cannot be symbolized—i.e. the Real of *jouissance*: through fantasy, *jouissance* is domesticated, gentrified."[19] The psychoanalytic notion of fantasy therefore plays a crucial role within Žižek's theoretical framework; through it, he deploys

a complex network of philosophical approaches to cultural, political, and media phenomena. While psychoanalysis is traditionally aimed at providing the subject with a better understanding of a given symptom, "[f]or Žižek, psychoanalysis is a form of understanding significance not just for individuals, but for the mediascape at large."[20]

Among his many recourses to the Lacanian notion of fantasy, Žižek puts forward the central idea that our symbolically mediated reality is structured by fantasmatic scenarios that are relayed both intersubjectively and through ideologically oriented mass media. Let us be reminded that, as it is articulated through Lacan by Žižek, fantasy serves as a lure, a narrative structure that leads the subject to believe he has access to the object-cause of desire. Hence, the tying function of fantasy (◊) serves as a protective mechanism, shielding the subject from the traumatic Real of an actual encounter with the impossible *objet a*. But as Žižek points out, "the relationship between fantasy and the horror of the Real it conceals is much more ambiguous than it may seem: fantasy conceals this horror, yet at the same time it creates what it purports to conceal, its 'repressed' point of reference."[21] This ambiguous connection between fantasy, *objet a,* and the Real is indeed potentially misleading, as it could be tempting to view fantasy as the staging of the realization of a given desire.

While fantasy does provide an *imaginary* access to the *objet a*, it is through its imaginary status that fantasy also protects the subject from actually realizing the desire and accessing a traumatic *jouissance*. It is precisely here that the ideological nature of fantasy is revealed. While traditional industrial and modern societies are based on the shared sacrifice of *jouissance* one must accomplish in order to access the social and intersubjective Symbolic structure, these very societies "must provide some way of alleviating the sense of lack without endangering the social structure;"[22] this is where fantasy plays a vital role in perpetuating Symbolic authority. Through fantasy, "one seems not to have to sacrifice the object. One is able to enjoy it, but with the restriction that one can only enjoy *the image of the object*, not the object itself."[23] And although McGowan (2004) aptly argues the undergoing of a radical change from a society of prohibition to one of commanded enjoyment, this change does not in any way diminish the role fantasy plays in the perpetuation of ideology. While it acts as a respite from ideological demands within societies based on prohibition, fantasy also plays a central role within the society of commanded enjoyment, as ideology now demands that we perpetually occupy its terrain.

Therefore, it is no wonder that fantasy holds such a central place within Žižek's re-articulation of the Lacanian paradigm. After all, it is the entry of a given object within the "framework of fantasy" that "gives consistency to the subject's desire."[24] In this regard, film and visual media play a central role in disseminating fantasies within contemporary mediascapes. In the opening lines of *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (Dir. Sophie Fiennes, 2006), Žižek states that "Cinema is the ultimate pervert art. It doesn't give you what you desire; it tells you how to desire"—a statement consistent with his assessment that "through fantasy, we learn 'how to desire.'"[25] Of course, cinema does this by

framing the coordinates of desire through the staging of fantasy. By extending this statement to visual media, particularly advertising, music videos, and television shows of various genres, it seems obvious that the contemporary Lacanian paradigm defined by Žižek remains a promising one, as it goes beyond traditional criticism and considers the radical—Real—underside of ideological mass-mediated discourses.

Because desire does not emanate from the subject but, rather, from the ominous Other who wants something from us, fantasy is necessarily an answer to the unbearable enigma of the desire of the Other—an enigma that Lacan phrases through the Italian question "*Che vuoi*?" By attempting to mediate the void between the subject and its impossible object, fantasy "is the frame co-ordinating our desire, but at the same time [it is also] a defence against '*Che vuoi?*', a screen concealing the gap, the abyss of the desire of the Other."[26] As such, the use of a Žižekian approach within film and media studies allows us not only to go beyond ideology critique and to uncover a form of radical emancipation, such as the traversing of the cultural fantasy; it also allows a rereading of media paradigms developed by thinkers such as Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard.

Hence, through Žižek's integration of the Lacanian notions of desire, *objet a*, and fantasy within the analysis of popular culture, cinema, mass media, as well as various cultural and political phenomena, contemporary theorists can rely on a complex conceptual edifice from which they can offer various vantage points on the very discourses that structure our Symbolic reality. Many have credited Žižek for translating Lacan's difficult writing and seminars into a tangible psychoanalytic framework allowing them to approach media. While it is true that Žižek manipulates the Lacanian paradigm with astute argumentation and exemplification, it remains crucial to note that he first and foremost recuperates Lacan's thought, rendering it amenable to the analysis of contemporary media.

Enjoying the Media: Žižekian Media Studies

This book is divided into four sections—Media, Ideology, and Politics; Popular Culture; Film and Cinema; and, Social Media and the Internet—each of which draws upon key aspects of Žižek's own engagement with the media. Our intention with this book is to introduce readers to new developments in the field of Žižekian media scholarship. The approaches presented here also make significant contributions to this new field and demonstrate ways in which Žižekian media studies differs from the earlier Lacanian variety. While Lacan has long been an influence in film, media, and cultural theory, there is, today, an emerging field of Žižekian media scholarship that addresses questions about the Real, fantasy, the *objet petit a*, and the drive. But Žižekian media scholarship is distinguished, not only by referring to Žižek's version of Lacan, but also for addressing key problems in Žižek's writings that are related to media and ideology critique. These include a significant focus on emancipatory politics and the problematic of the "demise of symbolic efficiency."

The problem of the demise of symbolic efficiency is related to the question: how is it possible to propose a critique of ideology in the (supposedly) post-ideological era? Fredric Jameson addresses this question in his renowned essay from 1984, "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," and later in the subsequent book of the same title. In order to explain the postmodern demise of symbolic efficiency, Jameson refers to the Lacanian conception of psychosis as a "breakdown of the signifying chain," which signals a suspension of the operation of "suture" that ties together the field of floating signifiers in the Symbolic order. The thesis of the demise of symbolic efficiency posits the experience of a post-ideological condition in the sense that the master narratives of modernity are no longer operative. Master narratives such as religious narratives, Enlightenment narratives of progress, and emancipatory narratives, such as Marxism, no longer function as structures of (what Jameson calls) "cognitive mapping." The condition of postmodernity is one in which all such narratives have been deconstructed to the point of losing their entire symbolic weight in the meaning-making practices of subjects in the social world; or, to put it in Lacanian terms: today, everyone seems to already know that the big Other does not exist.

Despite this fact, Žižek argues that ideology is still operative on the obverse side of the demise of symbolic efficiency, but below the surface level of symbolic reality. Postmodernism may signal the suspension of the function of the "Master-Signifier," but there exists a "spectral" underside of ideology (the operation of the *objet a* and fantasy), which more forcefully attaches the subject to the symbolic surface of ideological propositions.

With the demise of symbolic efficiency, and the suspension of the function of the Master-Signifier, enjoyment plays a much stronger role in interpellating ideological subjects. In opposition to the modernist order of prohibition and authority, postmodernism is marked by the superego injunction: "Enjoy!" Today, not only are we supposedly free to enjoy; we are increasingly *obligated* to enjoy. This is something that we continue to see and experience in our media-saturated, consumerist "society of the spectacle," where the constant commandment is: Enjoy! Psychoanalysis, for Žižek, offers emancipatory cognitive mapping for the postmodern subject because it is the only discourse in which the subject is allowed to *not* enjoy (which is qualitatively different from "not allowed to enjoy").

In this sense, Žižek has provided media theorists with a method for thinking both the new, postmodern forms taken by ideological interpellation, which draws upon the concept of the *objet a*, fantasy, and desire, and a language for thinking about emancipation from the hold of ideology—a method that differs significantly from the formalist models of resistance developed by early Screen theory, which drew heavily upon the Brechtian notion of "rupture" and "distancing" in its theories of alternative cinema.[27] Enjoyment, for Žižek, is not only the mode of interpellation; it is also that with which the subject must identify in order to break free of the reigning ideology. It is in this sense that Žižek emphasizes the role of the death drive in emancipatory politics. If with

desire the subject constantly fails to attain its object, then with drive the subject continues to enjoy failure.

A focus on the demise of symbolic efficiency and on drive marks a significant difference between the older Lacanian models of Lacanian film and media theory and a strictly Žižekian approach. This is signaled in the work of Žižekian media scholars such as Jodi Dean and Todd McGowan. While Dean argues through her conception of "communicative capitalism" that, under the conditions of the demise of symbolic efficiency, drive rather than desire integrates the subject further into the matrices of networked society, McGowan follows Žižek in arguing that drive is central to re-imagining a revolutionary aesthetic in the cinema.[28] Paul A. Taylor goes further in arguing that, at a time when most of us acknowledge the non-existence of the big Other, the media increasingly helps to recreate its effects. As he puts it, "[w]e engage with media, like the cinema and cyberspace not to escape from, but rather in order to escape to a social reality that protects (mediates) us more effectively from the truly traumatic issues and concerns that belie our 'normal' lives."[29] Others, such as Fabio Vighi,[30] drawing on Žižek's re-interpretation of the Lacanian logics of sexuation, address the way that film and media allow us to understand something about the way that the Symbolic order is structured around gaps and cleavages that announce the Real and its surplus objects. It is the latter that, as well, provides terrain for thinking the political within the cultural levels of the media.

Ultimately, the scholarship presented in what follows demonstrates precisely how "talking about Hitchcock," and other examples of media, film, and popular culture, can indeed function as a political act. The authors included in this book show that it is perhaps sometimes much more politically effective to speak about the image than trying to articulate some more important "reality," behind the illusion. Since reality is already structured like a fiction, a Žižekian approach to media studies draws our attention to fictions that offer up the Real.

Notes

1. Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality* (New York: Verso, 1994), 1–2.
2. For a more thorough discussion of the debate between "film Theory" and "post-Theory," and between Žižek and David Bordwell more specifically, see Matthew Flisfeder, *The Symbolic, The Sublime, and Slavoj Žižek's Theory of Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), especially chapter 3.
3. Žižek, "The Undergrowth of Enjoyment," *New Formations* 9: 7–29, 1989, 7.
4. Ibid.
5. Indeed, Copjec's "The Orthopsychic Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan" examines a different aspect of Screen theory's conceptual shortcomings. Focusing on the role of the mirror-stage essay within 1970s psychoanalytic film

studies, she states that the notion of a cinematic gaze derived from the analogy between screen and mirror "operates in ignorance of, and at the expense of, Lacan's more radical insight, whereby the mirror is conceived as screen" (Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists,* Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1994, 54). Describing how this initial (mis)conception of the cinematic gaze leads to a "'Foucauldization' of Lacanian theory" (56), Copjec aptly notes how the over-reliance on the mirror-stage essay led to the theorization of a cinematic gaze that shared very little with Lacan's ideas, specifying how the essay in question does not address the concept of the gaze—a concept that is rather deployed in Lacan's Seminar XI (66).

6. Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2007), 28.
7. Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2006), 3.
8. Žižek, 1994, 178.
9. Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), 53.
10. Elizabeth Cowie, *Representing the Woman*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, 288.
11. Indeed, while 1970s psychoanalytic film theory defined its version of the gaze along the lines of Lacan's mirror-stage essay, one must note that this text makes no mention of the gaze as such, but focuses on the child's look, a terminological disambiguation that Cowie (1997) discusses in *Representing the Woman*.
12. Cowie, 1997, 288.
13. McGowan, 11.
14. Ibid.
15. One might even wonder if the idea of "visual pleasure" should not be addressed rather as a "scopic *jouissance.*"
16. Castanet, Didier, "Fantasme et réel," *L'en-Je lacanien*, vol. 2, no. 9 (2007), 102.
17. Žižek, 2001, 55.
18. Chemama, Roland and Bernard Vandermersch, *Dictionnaire de la psychoanalyse*, Paris: Larousse, 1993, 131, our translation.
19. Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York: Verso, 1997), 123.
20. Paul A. Taylor, *Žižek and the Media* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2010), 15.
21. Žižek, 1997, 7.
22. McGowan, *The End of Dissatisfaction? Jacques Lacan and the Emerging Society of Enjoyment* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2003), 18.
23. Ibid., 19.
24. Žižek, 1989, 119.
25. Ibid., 118.
26. Ibid. André Nusselder recently published two books that deal with fantasy as screen in a technological and media studies perspective: *Interface Fantasy: A Lacanian Cyborg Ontology* (2009) and *The Surface Effect: The Screen of Fantasy in Psychoanalysis* (2013).
27. One of the most notorious examples of such a model of resistance remains Peter Wollen's *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter Strategies* (1982), as well as Wollen's and Laura Mulvey's filmic endeavour *Riddles of the Sphynx* (1977).
28. See Jodi Dean, 2002, 2009, and 2010; and, McGowan, 2011.
29. Taylor, 2010, 78.
30. See Vighi, 2009.

Part I

Media, Ideology, and Politics

Žižek's Reception: Fifty Shades of Gray Ideology

By Paul A. Taylor

Introduction

A self-confessed dogmatic Lacanian-Hegelian, Slavoj Žižek holds the unusual, almost oxymoronic, status of being classed as a celebrity academic. He is routinely hyped by journalists as "the Elvis of Cultural Theory" or "the most dangerous philosopher in the West." Despite, or, perhaps more accurately, because of his widespread popularity in nonacademic circles, his work has also received damning condemnation from some critics and fellow scholars. Occasionally vitriolic in his tone, Žižek appears to get under the skin of reviewers like few other thinkers, and indeed this has led to whole books designed to debunk him, such as the ambiguously titled *The Truth of Žižek*.[1] This chapter explores Žižek's negative reception in terms of both the divided response among intellectuals with a media voice and the still-divided, but much more positive, reception of his thoughts by audiences that are unusually large and enthusiastic considering the relatively esoteric theoretical nature of the material Žižek presents.

An important part of the intellectual context of Žižek's reception is the chasm that exists between those who see themselves as part of an Anglo-Saxon tradition of empirically rooted quasiscientific social inquiry and those who are drawn to the much more openly speculative philosophy that has come to be known as continental thought. One major bone of contention between the two schools relates to the status of facts. While the Anglo-Saxon tradition tends to see them as statements that are verifiable by scientific testing, continental philosophy is known for emphasizing how their status is relative to the context from which they derive. Subsequently, a second difference exists between their chosen methods of conceptualizing those facts, especially in relation to the realm of culture. "Social science" applies rigorous methods to cultural phenomena, while

continental philosophy seeks to understand those aspects of society that exist but which, it argues, cannot be adequately conceptualized via empirical methods. For example, ideology is a widely recognized phenomenon, but one that is observable through its affects/effects rather than any systematically measurable qualities.

In this chapter, forceful criticisms of Žižek's attitude toward facts are illustrated with specific reference to his emblematic approach to the subject of violence. More generally, Žižek's reception is dominated by two opposing, but both essentially uncritical, distortions:

  i) Uncritical fixation upon the curiosity and entertainment value of a celebrity thinker.
 ii) Hypercritical knee-jerk condemnation (that in its excess avoids actual substantive critique) from dogmatically empiricist commentators for whom Žižek's speculative philosophy acts a "postmodern" plessor.[2]

Both of these types of response involve ignoring the substance of Žižek's thought. The enjoyment of his theoretical pyrotechnics as entertainment requires the suspension of critical faculties for pure enjoyment of the spectacle, and this phenomenon is explored later using specific firsthand experience of giving a talk with Žižek at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London.[3] The hypercritical dismissal of Žižek, dealt with first here, often requires the active application of intelligence to avoid recognition of (as distinct from agreement with) what Žižek is actually saying. This willful conceptual myopia is illustrated using the particularly egregious example of John Gray's *New York Times* review of *Less Than Nothing* and *Living in the End Times*, titled "The Violent Visions of Slavoj Žižek."[4]

Gray's Anatomy of Truth

John Gray's fiercely dismissive *New York Times* review typifies the Anglo-Saxon–continental split, fueled as it is by the charge that Žižek does not engage with objective rational thought. Particularly significant is the precise nature of Gray's questioning of Žižek's notion of truth. When Gray asks, "Why should anyone adopt Žižek's ideas rather than any others?" he proceeds to answer his own question with an accurate and cogent summary of the rationale behind Žižek's method:

> The answer cannot be that Žižek's [ideas] are true in any traditional sense. "The truth we are dealing with here is not 'objective' truth," Žižek writes, "but the self-relating truth about one's own subjective position; as such, it is an engaged truth, measured not by its factual accuracy but by the way it affects the subjective position of enunciation." If this means anything, it is that truth is determined by reference to how an idea accords with the projects to which the speaker is committed—in Žižek's case, a project of revolution.[5]

Apart from the inaccuracy of the objection that Žižek's method eschews "factual accuracy," which we will shortly examine, this is an excellent summary of the reflexive essence of how he does, "in fact," address an inescapable fact about facts themselves—they do not exist in a pure state of objectivity. But, while Gray is fully aware of the substantive answer to his charge that Žižek peddles merely subjective thoughts, in what might be seen as a rhetorical "Trojan mouse," he chooses to proceed as if the mere act of describing an opposing position is equivalent to successfully undermining it.

Any purportedly neutral presentation of the facts requires deconstruction and critique to reveal the various forms of ideological bias that, in fact, pervade that appearance of neutrality—the essence of Heidegger's distinction between what is true and what is merely correct. If Gray's denunciation itself means anything, that meaning rests in its clear, albeit inadvertent, demonstration of a cynical aspect of contemporary culture that is frequently highlighted in the work he is busy scorning. This is Žižek's notion of *fetishistic disavowal*—the phenomenon in which people are able to recognize a truth but proceed as if they hadn't, a situation encapsulated in the psychoanalytical phrase "*Je sais bien, mais quand même*" (I know very well, but nevertheless). Thus, Gray knows that Žižek is explicit about the position from which he makes his subjective enunciations about the world and that this provides the reader with the basis from which to gauge its value. But he proceeds as if he didn't know this and rhetorically caricatures Žižek's method as the generation of ideas from an arbitrary basis. It is with comments like "If this means anything" that we can see the distinctly nonconceptual, strongly emotional energy expended on the widening of the empiricist–continental divide.

At the time of writing, the latest manifestation of knee-jerk emotionality directed at Žižek can be seen in his quarrel with Chomsky, predictably portrayed by the media in fighting terms—"The Slavoj Žižek v. Noam Chomsky spat is worth a ringside seat" and "Chomsky vs. 'Elvis' in a Left-Wing Cage Fight."[6] In a December 2012 online interview, Noam Chomksy's disdain for Žižek's brand of nonempiricist, reflexivity-privileging thought is conveyed unambiguously:

> What you're referring to is what's called "Theory." And when I said I'm not interested in theory, what I meant is, I'm not interested in posturing—using fancy terms like polysyllables and pretending you have a theory when you have no theory whatsoever. So there's no theory in any of this stuff, not in the sense of theory that anyone is familiar with in the sciences or any other serious field. Try to find in all of the work you mentioned some principles from which you can deduce conclusions, empirically testable propositions where it all goes beyond the level of something you can explain in five minutes to a twelve-year-old. See if you can find that when the fancy words are decoded. I can't. So I'm not interested in that kind of posturing. Žižek is an extreme example of it. I don't see anything to what he's saying.[7]

The best single illustration of this active unwillingness to recognize Žižek's analysis of ideology and its relationship to facts and, additionally, how that unwillingness is facilitated by the sensationalist predispositions of the media, is provided by the reception that has met Žižek's statement that historical despots like Hitler, Stalin, and Pol Pot were *not violent enough* and the accompanying, highly offensive, charge that Žižek therefore is guilty of celebrating violence—a sense of offense that memorably led Adam Kirsch of the *New Republic* to label Žižek "the Deadly Jester."[8]

The likelihood that the misinterpretation of Žižek's analysis of violence is somehow an oversight is greatly lessened when it is considered that Žižek has devoted an eponymous book-length treatise to the subject.[9] At various points in his writings, Žižek unambiguously describes how history's horrific outbursts of dictatorial violence have been the result of those dictators' various failures to deal with the core contradictions at the heart of the societies they sought to radically alter. From this perspective, Hitler is a prime example of what psychoanalysis refers to as *passage a l'acte*—rather than deal with the true faults at the core of German society, he focused an entire society's productive energy on the attempted extermination of a whole people. It is only in this very specific conceptual sense that Žižek makes the otherwise outrageous claim that Hitler's violence was not violent enough. What he *is* referring to is how that violence was misdirected at the Jewish people as a historical scapegoat rather than the solution of any genuine political problem. Hitler and other dictators promised a radical overhaul of society, but instead, they pursued extreme violence for ultimately very limited conservative ideological ends that left the real core societal problems unaddressed. Acting as a theoretical Minerva's shield, Žižek encourages us to go beyond the Medusa-like horror of crimes against humanity in order to understand the underlying ideological processes that fuel their violence. He *does not* deny the horror of the Holocaust, but he challenges us to understand the true underlying ideology of such an obscene historical fact.

Gray's Violent Philosophy of Facts

Gray recognizes that "to criticize Žižek for neglecting . . . facts is to misunderstand his intent" but then, rather less generously adds, "for unlike Marx he does not aim to ground his theorizing in a reading of history that is based in facts . . . Whether such ideas correspond to anything in the world is irrelevant."[10] Contra Gray, even a cursory reading of Žižek's work shows it to be suffused with myriad worldly examples taken from everyday culture including objects, representations, social situations, and ranging from toilet designs, films and TV shows, to the amorous behavior of couples on a date. In fact, his philosophy is frequently criticized for being far too crude and earthy, including as it does numerous explicit sexual references. That, for many of his critics, Žižek is *too* grounded in the physical facts of reality demonstrates the inescapably

ideological nature of facts themselves—a Gradgrindian desire for "nothing but facts . . . stick to facts" does not prevent critics from being offended by the crude but indubitably factual physicality of his material. This exemplifies empiricism's tendency to fetishize its own structures of knowledge producing what C. Wright Mills termed *abstracted empiricism.*[11] In our contemporary media culture, it manifests itself when esoteric discussions by economists over evanescent statistics and arbitrarily fluctuating Wall Street decimal points are valued more highly than the political analysis of lived experience.

In contrast, Žižek's grounded speculations reflect the spirit of Barthes's commitment to the questioning of "what goes without saying"[12] and Heidegger's philosophical commitment to the relentless interrogation of our most basic categories of existence summed up in his credo, "Questioning is the piety of thought."[13] The very things, like facts, that present themselves as being beyond dispute in empiricist discourse, are subjected to sustained review, but as Žižek explains:

> To avoid a misunderstanding, I am not advocating here the "postmodern" idea that our theories are just stories we are telling each other, stories [that] cannot be grounded in facts; I am also not advocating a purely neutral unbiased view. My point is that the plurality of stories and biases is itself grounded in our real struggles. With regard to Chomsky, I claim that his bias sometimes leads him to selections of facts and conclusions [that] obfuscate the complex reality he is trying to analyze.[14]

This is the counterintuitive insight misrepresented by critics like Gray and Chomksy as a clownish indifference to facts. Consequently, Žižek may be dismissed as a joker but this characterization ignores the very serious historical role court jesters played in delivering the bad news to those in power that nobody else dared utter. The most high-profile jester of contemporary times, the Joker from the *Batman* movie franchise, neatly sums up the real, violent, ideological struggles that Žižek seeks to uncover:

> Nobody panics when things go "according to plan." Even if the plan is horrifying! If, tomorrow, I tell the press that, like, a gang banger will get shot, or a truckload of soldiers will be blown up, nobody panics, because it's all "part of the plan." But when I say that one little old mayor will die, well then everyone loses their minds![15]

Facts alone are therefore not enough to overcome the ideological component of the context from which they are derived, a point Žižek demonstrates through the example of the falsity of humanitarian interventions by Western liberal governments.

While it is right and politically proper to highlight the various forms of hypocrisy and cynical political interest that lie behind superficially moral interventions in as much detail as possible—"a job done quite well by Chomsky

himself," as Žižek points out[16]—such analysis remains one-dimensional. The further task remains:

> to explain how people often remain within their ideology even when they are forced to admit facts, one has to supplement investigation and disclosure of facts by the analysis of ideology which not only makes people blind for the full horror of facts but also enables them to participate in activities which generate these atrocious facts while maintaining the appearance of human dignity.[17]

Here, Žižek expresses a profoundly important theory-inspired attempt to break free from the perennial media-sponsored portrayal of exploitation as humanitarian aid that has blighted the history of whole countries—a striking example of which is provided by Haiti and such misleadingly lachrymose philanthropic initiatives as the "Everybody Hurts" charity video.[18] This ideological analysis is much more than just an empty posture.

Posturing About Posturing: The Return of the Repressed

If "posturing" is understood according to its conventional definition of adopting an attitude to impress or mislead, then Chomsky's dismissal of Žižek raises a series of important questions that have broader relevance to the status of theoretical thought in today's mediascape. Given that Žižek, as Gray himself points out, consistently reflects upon and articulates his subjective position of enunciation and self-confessed commitments, the charge of misleading his audience is difficult to justify. There is a vivid encapsulation of this in a scene from Astra Taylor's documentary *Žižek!* (2005) in which our eponymous subject forcefully responds to a questioner (and gesticulates appropriately to underscore the point) "Yes! I am a card-carrying Lacanian!" This leaves us to consider the notion that he adopts positions in order to impress. Given the unexpected nature of the runaway success of Žižek's "breakout" book, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*,[19] and the counterintuitive character of a publicity-seeking agenda based on publishing heavy tomes on esoteric aspects of Lacanian and Hegelian thought, the reasons why Žižek has impressed such a relatively large audience are more likely to be found in the characteristics of contemporary culture than his own deliberate strategies.

Using terms that Chomsky would doubtless reject as insufficiently scientific, the media reception of both Žižek's and Chomsky's work can be understood in terms of denial and the return of the repressed. Opposed to Žižek's self-reflexive commitment to revolution, Chomsky's political project is based on an ultimate belief in the persuasive power of facts. Ironically, this illustrates the previously encountered psychoanalytical notions of fetishistic disavowal and denial—Chomsky must know from years on the margins of political coverage that facts alone will not change the media's deeply biased modes of political

discourse, but he continues with his fact-privileging project anyway. Perhaps it is Chomksy's deep frustration at this situation that accounts for the displaced resentment directed at Žižek—the claim that there is nothing in Žižek's work that couldn't be explained to a twelve year old. What *is* in Žižek's work is a reflexive point about how ideology works both with and *without* facts—a point that an octogenarian political activist may not be able to understand but for whom, nevertheless, such knowledge could be of great practical help. Once again inadvertently illustrating the importance of the need to reflect upon the subjective position of enunciation, Chomksy's exclusion of any thought not based on the scientific model of empirically testable propositions from the designation "serious" could be seen as an instance of a *tu quoque* form of posturing. It misleadingly excludes from philosophy any knowledge that does not fit neatly within the science/social science paradigm.

Considering Chomsky's refusal to engage with the implications of Žižek's thought serves to elucidate the various, interrelated, levels of repression at play in the reception of theory:

Level 1   the posture of objectively rejecting subjective thought—Chomsky's position with regard to Žižek's notion of self-relating truth.

Level 2   the systematic rejection of openly subjective (speculative) thought—this is the wider media-sponsored rejection of continental-type thought.

Level 3   the systematically subjective rejection of objective thought—Chomsky's marginal presence in the mainstream media due to the media's longstanding ignoring of his fact-based analysis. A variation of the U.S. Army's "don't ask, don't tell" policy, the media's political discourse runs on the basis of "do tell, but don't ask us to do anything about it."

Level 4   the curiosity-inspired re-embracing of the "excessively" speculative thought the media systematically excludes—the return of the repressed such that Žižek is seen and enjoyed as an entertaining oddity.

Level 5   Chomsky's repression of the uncomfortable "unscientific" fact that we know about the facts he has provided us with, but we continue to carry on as if we didn't.

The end result of these factors is the flipside to the inaccurate charge that Žižek is pure posture. This flipside consists of the manner in which critics like Gray and Chomsky posture. They *do* seek to impress by establishing the credentials of their purportedly higher-order, more scientific mode of thinking, and, worst of all, they actively mislead—they know the distinctly different conceptual nature of Žižek's truth, but they traduce it anyway. While this is disappointing behavior from intellectuals eminently equipped with the resources to think

better, Gray and Chomsky's epistemological sniffiness is, at least, in keeping with the broader media and cultural zeitgeist.

Screening Thought: The Media's Gilded Cage

There is a double-edged nature to Žižek's engagement with popular culture. It is an open question as to whether the substance of his message can survive its undeniably entertaining mode of delivery. [20] Contemporary media attitudes to speculative thought are indicated by statements such as "The following contains opinions some viewers may find challenging" from a TV announcer's introduction to the punningly titled U.K. Channel 4 programme *4 Thought*. Apparently unironic, this announcement is intoned in the same way as the more usual warning that, "The following may contain scenes of a sexual or violent nature that some viewers may find offensive." In a neophyte media, "challenging" has become the new "offensive." Notwithstanding their role as academics, both Gray and Chomsky share this pre-emptive, *Minority Report*–like predisposition to screen imminent, incoming ideas. In Žižekian terms, we only pretend to pretend to believe that intellectuals are slumming it when they engage with the media—in practice, as audiences and readers that either expect or mutely tolerate the deracination of knowledge—within the media, thought is screened in more sense than one.

It goes without saying that, due to its innate tendency to privilege Žižek's humorous means over his serious ends, the media consistently ignores the substantive implications of his intellectual project (hence such mutually exclusive caricatures as "The Marx Brother" and "The most dangerous philosopher in the West"). What shouldn't go without saying, however, is the thought-screening role played by his most enthusiastic fans. To illustrate this point, I draw upon the example of a public talk I conducted with Žižek at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London on May 4, 2011, unambiguously (or so I thought) titled *Screening Thought*. Such is the level of Žižek's popularity that, to a certain extent, the conceptual purpose of *Screening Thought* was structurally undermined before it even began. To meet the high demand for tickets, the sold-out theater venue's seating capacity was increased by supplementing it with a live video feed into the adjoining ICA cinema. This literal screening curtailed Žižek's and my ability to engage with the audience's spontaneous cues since, to aid the live-feed cameras, we were asked to remain in the dark. Furthermore, because of technical difficulties in transmitting supplementary video images into the adjoining room, we were limited to using just one video example of media content with which to discuss the matter at hand.

Screening Thought was bookended by two further, nontechnical, illustrations of how the uncritical enjoyment of Žižek the media phenomenon serves to undermine the message of Žižek the philosopher. The evening began with the showing of Žižek's interview on the U.S. TV cultural show *NiteBeat*.[21]

I chose this excerpt to clearly demonstrate the process whereby the media trivializes philosophical thought with benign efficiency—Žižek becomes just another figure on a chat show with a commodity to plug (on this occasion, a copy of *The Puppet and The Dwarf* that the presenter, Barry Nolan, repeatedly flourishes). The stark contrast between the iridescently dentured Nolan and the bohemianly ursine Žižek is undeniably entertaining, but it appears that this was the primary focus for many of the ICA audience that night, who, like TV viewers, were predisposed to enjoy the spectacle of thought rather than its conceptual substance. The evening ended with a single question. The fact that there was only time for one question was another popularity-induced structural limitation of the event. Although running over the schedule was not a problem in the room where the talk took place, there was a time limit to the availability of the overflow room to avoid the risk that the cinema-based audience might feel shortchanged if they missed a subsequent part of the event witnessed by the live audience.

The "question" that was piped in from the cinema, appropriately enough given Žižek's psychoanalytical interests, took the form of an acousmatic, disembodied voice effusively praising Žižek, and, after much meandering, it eventually petered out into a vague query of how he dealt with his popularity. Until that evening at the ICA, I had blithely overlooked the extent to which the strength of the forces arrayed against critical thought may also include the unwitting contribution of its own nominal devotees. Žižek's thought is thus squeezed between disingenuous detractors who deliberately misrepresent him and the negative consequences caused, perversely, by an excessively uncritical and enthusiastic response to his relatively successful media profile. Arendt's open question* assumes fresh resonance when considering how much enjoyment can be derived from a Žižek performance before our witnessing of theory becomes an unreflexive end in itself and a betrayal of its original radical impetus. In that sense, even audiences well-versed in critical thought remain vulnerable to those repressive tendencies that work so "normally" and unobtrusively within the mainstream media.

Conclusion: Assuming One's Role in the Media's Game of Cunning Reason

Žižek's media performances involve a balancing act between his desire to break through the media's standard thought-screening procedures in order to act as what Kafka called "the axe for the frozen sea within us"[22] and having his message drowned in the media's ocean of trivial detail and ideological disavowal. Žižek's concluding remarks at the ICA dealt with how there is a deeply serious purpose behind his superficial obscenities. Theoretically reflexive as ever, he seems fully aware of the gilded nature of his media cage. Rather than rattling

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*see note 20

those bars in protest to no useful purpose, however, and taking into account his own "personal pathologies," Žižek's willing engagement with the more facile aspects of media performances is the price to be paid for attempting to lower people's ideological defenses and inadvertently encouraging them to consider modes of thought they would otherwise resist. Just as Žižek has repeatedly pointed out that when critics make fun of Berlusconi, they should not fail to notice that behind his buffoonery he retains real power, so, as a left-wing critical corollary, Žižek's critics should be aware of the genuinely powerful impact that lies behind his constant stream of crude humor, or, as Todd McGowan puts it, "the path to seriousness is strewn with jokes."[23] While others continue to either lionize or deliberately misrepresent and condemn him, Žižek, at least, is canny enough to know the true basis of his wager with the media's screening of thought rests on his willingness to assume his role within the media's game of cunning reason.

Notes

1. Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp (eds.), *The Truth of Žižek* (London: Continuum Press, 2007).
2. A plessor is the small rubber-headed hammer used by physicians to test reflexes.
3. Paul A. Taylor and Slavoj Žižek, "Screening Thought," London, Institute of Contemporary Arts, May 6, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=410z4x6ZbtY (accessed July 30, 2013).
4. John Gray, "The Violent Visions of Slavoj Žižek," *New York Times*, July 12, 2012, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/jul/12/violent-visions-slavoj-Žižek/?pagination=false (accessed July 30, 2013).
5. Ibid.
6. Peter Thompson and Sohab Ahmari, "Chomsky vs. 'Elvis' in a Left-Wing Cage Fight," *Wall St. Journal*, July 28, 2013, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324328904578622190386123344.html (accessed July 30, 2013).
7. Noam Chomsky, "Virtual Town Hall," Interview with Noam Chomsky, Dec, 2012, http://veteransunplugged.com/theshow/archive/118-chomsky-december-2012 (accessed July 30, 2013).
8. Adam Kirsch, "The Deadly Jester," *New Republic*, December 2, 2008, http://www.newrepublic.com/article/books/the-deadly-jester (accessed July 30, 2013).
9. Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2008).
10. John Gray, 2012.
11. C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* ([1959] 2000).
12. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*.
13. Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 1954, 14.
14. Slavoj Žižek, "Some Bewildered Clarifications," *The International Journal of Žižek Studies*, Vol 7.2, 2013, http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/ijzs/article/view/443/487.
15. Christopher Nolan, *The Dark Knight*, 2008.
16. Slavoj Žižek, "Some Bewildered Clarifications."
17. Ibid.

18. Various artists, "Helping Haiti—Everybody Hurts," http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ts1HxVopG2k (accessed July 30, 2013).

19. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 1989.

20. As Hannah Arendt notes, "There are many great authors of the past who have survived centuries of oblivion and neglect, but it is still an open question whether they will be able to survive an entertaining version of what they have to say." Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 207–8.

21. Barry Nolan interviews Slavoj Žižek on *NiteBeat*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KjEtmZZvGZA (accessed July 30, 2013).

22. Franz Kafka, letter to Oskar Pollak, 1904.

23. Todd McGowan, "Enjoying the Cinema," *The International Journal of Žižek Studies*, vol. 1.3, 2007, http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/ijzs/article/download/57/119.

The Sublime Absolute: Althusser, Žižek, and the Critique of Ideology

By Agon Hamza

Slavoj Žižek's relation to Louis Althusser is ambiguous.[1] There is always something perplexing about Žižek's reference qua critique to Althusser; tensions arise precisely in those points that, in Žižek's view, mark the impasse of Althusser's project. Although, both philosophers try to articulate a Marxist-based ideology-critique: that is to say, Marx is the departing point for both (to a certain degree, of course) in which they both take the same path, but separate in different direction. As a result, we get *two* Marxes: the Spinozist and a Hegelian Marx. On one hand, there is a Marx who could not get fully rid of his Hegelian "remainders." On the other hand, there is a Marx who is not sufficiently Hegelian. In this chapter, I will leave aside the ontological and/or metaphysical commitments of the two philosophers and limit myself to the concept of *ideologiekritik* and hereby introduce Althusser as another of the most important interlocutors of Žižek in this enterprise. In doing so, Žižek becomes an "Althusserian critic of Althusser." That is to say, through his critique directed at Althusser, Žižek arrives at Althusserian conclusions.[2]

Following this, the first thesis I want to put forward is that Althusser reaches his notion in Žižek's opus. The crucial misunderstanding should be avoided here: Žižek is not and cannot serve as either a mere "supplement" to Althusser's work, filling in the gaps and making up for cracks and fissures in the latter's work, or as the matrix for really understanding Althusser. Žižek's project stands for the most consequent exposition and development of Althusser's project. In other words, Althusser's limits are pushed forward by Žižek's philosophical system. Žižek's work, and especially his recently published *Less Than Nothing*, is the work that Althusser announced many times but never managed

to accomplish. If Althusser reaches his notion in Žižek's work, then the latter is at the same time the "condition of the possibility" of the former.[3] With respect to this, I argue that Althusser's philosophy can be grasped only insofar as it is positioned in relation to Žižek's further radicalization, which is to say, Žižek's Hegelianism. Following Žižek's method, I want to argue that Althusser's work can be read backward, through a Žižekian perspective. With respect to this, I will explore the possibility of suturing Althusser's and Žižek's theories of ideology critique—in other words, I will focus on Žižek's radicalization of Althusser's thesis on ideology, via a detour through Hegel's philosophy, with references to cinema and media.

In undertaking this task, the question persists: What makes Althusser our contemporary, and furthermore, why he should be put in a debate with Žižek? The first obvious answer would have been, because he is a very important—if not the crucial—interlocutor of Žižek's theory of the critique of ideology. However, this claim calls for a more detailed elaboration. Althusser's lifetime project, or what I refer to as his self-given theoretical responsibility, was to give Marx "veritable concepts worthy of him." That is to say, Althusser attempted to rethink the philosophical and political potential of Marxism. To utilize Hegelian terminology, I argue that the philosophy of Marxism reached its notion with Althusser in the philosophical and ideological conjuncture of his time, the era of structuralism. Consequently Althusser's oeuvre in the 1960s captured the spirit of the time. In this enterprise, his move was to extrapolate Marx's thinking from the assumptions of Hegelian teleological tendencies. In short, Althusser attempted to write a philosophy for Marx that would be based in non-Hegelian dialectics, which in his view was a dialectical process without any guarantees. Nevertheless, this very specter roams throughout Althusser's work, persisting, returning—sometimes even violently.

To propose a rather schematic thesis, I will argue that Althusser *is* Hegelian precisely on those (dark) moments of dismissing Hegel's philosophy (or historicism). To follow Althusser's own proposition, for a philosopher, "it is not their intentions that count. What counts are the real effects of their philosophies."[4] Žižek, who purports as "some sort of a Marxist," calls for a return from Marx to Hegel in order to re-invent the idea of communism. If we take this as a departing point, then one could easily argue that the return to Marx is not enough. I claim that one can think about Marx in his or her own way, although as Althusser put it, it might not be "exactly the way Marx himself thought."[5] With respect to this, the task of both philosophers, in their specific conjunctures, is to "constitute the kernel of an authentic materialist ideology and of a philosophy" that would "facilitate the emergence of a progressive ideology."[6]

For Althusser ideology always functions in the opposition to sciences. Borrowing from Gaston Bachelard, Althusser employs the concept of the "epistemological break," which he first used to periodize Marx's work, which is to say,

the "idealist-ideological" Marx vs. the "scientific" Marx (especially) of *Capital*, to mark the foundation of his "critique of ideology."[7] In fact, according to Althusser, *Capital* is the work "by which Marx has to be judged," and this is the work into which Althusser puts most of his effort. For Althusser, Marx's "scientific work," especially his *Capital*, contains the *philosophical* thesis that would best suit Marx's own scientific project. In this enterprise, Althusser's task was that of the "determining the type of philosophy [that] best corresponds to what Marx wrote in *Capital*,"[8] which would result not in Marxist philosophy, but in philosophy *in favor of* Marxism. Hence Althusser's famous statement that it is difficult to be a Marxist in philosophy. As a result, one of the possible ways of constructing the philosophy for Marxism is through the critique of ideology. The logical question to be posed here: what is the function of philosophy for Althusser?

The main task of philosophy is to draw lines of demarcation between scientific practice and ideological propositions. Philosophy is defined in its double relation to the sciences and ideologies. In this regard, philosophy is a dividing activity of thought. It thinks demarcations, distinctions, divisions, within the realm of thought. Therefore, philosophy has an intervening role by suggesting theses that contribute to "opening the way to a correct" way of formulating the very problems in which it intervenes.[9] According to Althusser, by stating theses (which should be understood as positions), philosophy produces philosophical categories. When he defines philosophy as the class struggle in theory, in the last instance,[10] Althusser is being very precise: philosophy functions by not intervening in the matter or bodies, or in the class struggle, but it intervenes in theory. This intervention provokes or produces theoretical effects. In other words the "enigma of philosophy is contained in the difference between the reality in which it intervenes (the domain of the *sciences* + theoretical *ideologies* + philosophy) and the result that its intervention produces (the distinction between the *scientific* and the *ideological*)."[11] The indispensable result is what Althusser calls the *philosophy effect*. In this sense, philosophy does not think either sciences or politics. Philosophy's function should "serve sciences, rather than enslave them." To reiterate this in Badiou's vocabulary, philosophy has the task of articulating and critiquing the effects of the events of the class struggle. Therefore, everything that happens in philosophy has "in the last instance, not only political consequences in theory, but also political consequences *in politics*: in the political class struggle."[12] Taking all this into account, the intervention in the two distinct realities (that of scientific and ideological) is internal, and the *philosophy effects* produce changes within philosophy itself.

Based on this, how are we to rethink Althusser's theory of the critique of ideology? Here I risk the hypothesis that, in a certain way, his entire theory of the critique of ideology is in the service of this thesis, which in his idea of rethinking Marxism means to prove it right, supplement it, and render it compatible with his project of rereading Marxism. The entire Marxist enterprise in philosophy is centered around the possibility of distinguishing between science

and ideology, not only in their realities, but also in the reference to the work of Marx himself. This brings us back to the concept of "epistemological break." Bachelard writes that when observing the scientific progress, we immediately see that "the problem of scientific knowledge must be posed in the terms of obstacles."[13] This thesis led Althusser to conclude that "Marx could not possibly have become Marx except by founding a theory of history and a philosophy of the historical distinction between ideology and science."[14] In this respect, I would argue that his philosophical project of reading Marx philosophically centered around the concept of the "critique of ideology."

Althusser's theory of the critique of ideology can be epitomized in the following thesis: *Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects.* How does interpellation work in Althusser's theory and, furthermore, why did it cause a stream of criticisms and distantiations, especially of his former students? According to Althusser, "All ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects by the functioning of the category of the subject." The existence of ideology is conditioned or dependent on the constitution of the subject: "The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing."[15] Althusser continues by arguing for the "duplicate mirror-structure of ideology," which simultaneously ensures:

1. the interpellation of "individuals" as subjects;
2. their subjection to the category of Subject;
3. the mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects' recognition of each other, and finally the subject's recognition of himself;
4. the absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be all right.[16]

How can this be explained? When Althusser writes that the subject is an ideological category, one can read it according to Badiou's terminology: the Althusserian subject is always-already part of the state of the situation, which means that his subject is always-already part of the positive order of being and it cannot be the site of an event. When he writes that "the notion subject is ideological,"[17] he thereby means that "the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects." In this sense, it is the subject that renders ideology possible, which means that ideology is possible only insofar as it constitutes the subject and operates through him/her. Therefore he maintains that the "object is a mirroring reflection of subject."[18]

All this can be summarized in the following thesis: *There is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects.* The crucial element to be noted here is that the subject is constituted in ideological rituals, that is, the hailing. If the practical ritual of "recognition" has the function of rendering "obvious" the materiality of ideology, it by no means gives us the knowledge of this

mechanism. Therefore, the only way to actually admit existence of ideology is through admitting it from within: "Ideology never says, 'I am ideological.' It is necessary to be outside ideology, that is, in scientific knowledge, to be able to say: I am in ideology."[19]

Ideology is hence postulated as a reality because it "represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence." Ideology renders possible the functioning of the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA), which have a material base, which means that "ideology has a material existence." This hypothesis is essential for analyzing the nature of ideology as not "spiritual but material existence of 'ideas' or other 'representations.'" The ruling ideology is realized in Ideological State Apparatuses also because, "No class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses." One can say that for Althusser, there is no practice except by and in ideology, and the ideology exists by and for the subjects. Henceforth, his main thesis, *ideology interpellates individuals as subjects*, and therefore, *individuals are always-already subjects*.

Many commentators have noted the impossibility of the Althusserian interpellated subject. It presents the impossibility, an impasse for the politics of emancipation. Althusser has been very careful throughout his work to distinguish between politics, ideology, and science and also to emphasize the distinction between political, scientific, and economic practice. With a proper dialectical move, he maintains that every practice (or process) exists in relation with (other) practices. This considers why, for Althusser, "the concept process is scientific." Taking into account that "the notion subject is ideological" and the "concept process is scientific," he proposes his thesis of "process without a subject." Explaining the "process without a subject or goal(s)," Althusser writes,

> History really is a "process without a Subject or Goal(s)," where the given *circumstances* in which "men" act as subjects under the determination of social *relations* are the product of the *class struggle*. History therefore does not have a Subject, in the philosophical sense of the term, but a *motor*: that very class struggle."[20]

This thesis should be read together with two others: 1) *It is the masses that make history*, and 2) *The class struggle is the motor of history*. Althusser proposes this concept in his attempt to struggle against Hegelian teleological dialectics, which in Althusser's reading is constituted as a process with a subject, as it were. Following this, it can be argued that there is no ontological theory or status of the subject in the Althusser's work.

To my knowledge, this is one of the most radical anti-ontological theses. With this thesis, Althusser is content with providing epistemological positions (or framework) for his materialism. In this spirit it is important to note that in his late phase, Althusser endeavors to construct an ontological framework for

his materialism. It is crucial to note, however, that Althusser never gave up on the "process without a subject." It is Althusser's conviction that the "process without a subject" is the correct term to avoid theoretical deviations in politics. As he put it, theoretical deviations in politics are in the last instance *philosophical* deviations and account for the great historical failures of the proletariat:

> We can call by their real names the theoretical deviations [that] have led to the great historical defeats for the proletariat, that of the Second International, to mention only one. Such deviations are referred to as economism, evolutionism, voluntarism, humanism, empiricism, dogmatism, and so on. These deviations are *philosophical* deviations and were denounced as philosophical deviations by the great workers' leaders starting with Engels and Lenin."[21]

This accounts for Althusser's life project: putting forward theses and positions, later on negating (negation plays a very important role in Althusser's philosophy) and correcting them. As François Matheron put it, "Althusser progressively destroyed the theses he had constructed," which is to say, every new thesis serves as a "correction" of the older one. Even though his late writings have been published, his research remains radically unfinished.

Given this, how are we to reconcile Althusser and Žižek? The path that one shouldn't follow is that of looking at the moments of cracks, breaks, and fissures in his enterprise in order to speculatively suture them. Althusser ought to be read in his *totality* and should be held responsible for his philosophical position in the realm of thought. One of the main tensions in Althusser's work is between epistemology and ontology. This can be rendered visible best by two of his definitions of philosophy: 1) philosophy is the theory of theoretical practice, and 2) philosophy presents, in the last instance, the class struggle in theory. After 1965, he constantly attempts to produce a "de-epistemologization of philosophy."[22] However, since he constructs his ontological framework only in the 1980s, the thesis to be pushed forward is that Althusser's subject is founded on epistemological grounds, and every attempt to read the "interpellated" subject via Lacan's subject is rendered inappropriate because of the ontological status of the Lacanian subject.

Elisabeth Roudinesco has provided an account of the separation of Althusser's and Lacan's paths: "[W]hile Althusser believed that only by escaping from all filial symbolism could one achieve a founding act, Lacan showed that, on the contrary, while such an escape might indeed produce logical discourse, such discourse would be invaded by psychosis."[23] For Lacanians, the subject emerges where ideology fails,"[24] because "the subject, prior to recognition in the Other, is not simply the individual." In other words, the Lacanian subject is indeed the failure to become or interpellate into an Althusserian subject, which is to say, the subject is nothing "beyond" this failure and thus emerges through this failure. The *objet petit a* in this process operates as a merely a positivization/embodiment of this failure.[25] Žižek clarifies this position further: "Not only does the subject never fully recognize itself in the interpellative call: its

resistance to interpellation (to the symbolic identity provided by interpella-
tion) is the subject" which he equals with *hysteria*—the "stance of permanent
questioning of the symbolic identity."[26]

According to Žižek, "the weak point of [Althusser's] theory is that he or
his school never succeeded in thinking out the link between Ideological State
Apparatuses and ideological interpellation: how does the Ideological State
Apparatus (the Pascalian 'machine,' the signifying automatism) 'internalize'
itself," which is to say, how does it produce the ideological belief in the Cause, or
(ideological) recognition (that is, the hailing)? Following Pascal, Žižek argues
that in the very process of internalization, there is something that is left over, a
residue, and "*this leftover, far from hindering the full submission of the subject to
the ideological command, is the very condition of it*."[27] Robert Pfaller provides an
excellent critique of both Dolar's and Žižek's positions: for Pfaller, the distance
experienced toward interpellation is the very form of ideological misrecogni-
tion. For Althusser, the very act of questioning the attribute provided on me
by interpellation is itself part of the interepellative process. Pfaller argues that
"ideology even has to provide the subjects with such a feature in order to enable
them to 'transgress' their ideology: it has to interpellate them as something
'beyond ideology,' 'beyond identity.'"[28] In this sense Pfaller is arguing from an
Althusserian position that "in ideology, we do not only have to do with some
fantasmatic or imaginary content" because "ideology is as well the appearance
of a void, which seems to be something totally different from any ideological
content."[29] Therefore, when Žižek writes that interpellation is never successful
he misses the point because there is no outside to ideology and "what seems to
take place outside ideology, in reality takes place in ideology. What really takes
place in ideology seems therefore to take place outside it."[30]

The Žižekian subject cannot be accounted for without the reference to Ger-
man Idealism, especially Hegel. For Žižek the Hegel(ian) subject has negativ-
ity as its constitutive element. As Hegel put it in *Phenomenology*, "tarrying
with the negative" is the magic power that converts it into being.[31] In Žižek's
own words, "The Hegelian 'subject' is ultimately nothing but a name for the
externality of the Substance to itself, for the 'crack' by the way of which the
Substance becomes alien to itself, (mis)perceiving itself, through human eyes
as the inaccessible-reified of the Otherness."[32] According to Žižek's reading,
subjectivity is internal, immanent to substance; that it to say, it stands for its
incompleteness.[33] As Adrian Johnston writes, for Žižek "the true subject is
nothing other than this nothingness itself, this void, absence."[34] As paradoxical
as it might seem, this is the moment of subjective "reconciliation."

Let us return to the preface of the *Phenomenology*: "Everything turns
on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as
Subject"[35]—this famous passage from Hegel's preface creates the main ten-
sion and the moment of unification between Althusser's and Žižek's projects
at the same time. Following this Hegel continues that "this Substance is, as
Subject, pure, *simple negativity*, and is for this very reason the bifurcation

of the simple; it is the doubling, which sets up opposition, and then again the negation of this indifferent diversity and of its anti-thesis." Žižek argues that "not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*" shouldn't be read as "Substance is a Subject." According to Žižek, Hegel means something different: the Absolute should be conceived not only as a substance but also as a subject. Consequently the subject does not merely subordinate itself to the substance nor the substance becomes a subject, rather the substance, in its actuality, is indeed the subject at work. Henceforth "not only as Substance, but also as Subject" does not mean simply that Substance is "really" a force of subjective self-mediation, etc., "but that Substance is in itself ontologically flawed and incomplete."[36]

Against Spinozist Substance ("that which is in itself, and is conceived through itself", or "that of which a conception can be formed independently of any other conception"), one should apply the Hegelian motif of Substance as Subject, meaning "that the Absolute qua Real is not simply different or differentiated from finite entities—the Absolute is *nothing but* this difference".[37] The *Real* here should be read in the Žižekian-Lacanian sense: the *Real* is that very non-identity, the impossibility to become "itself" it is that something that resists symbolization. Perhaps this is better articulated through the title of Wallace Steven's poem, "not ideas about the thing, but the thing itself." This is where Althusser's point that, intentions don't matter, and that what counts are the effects, gains its complete meaning. Indeed Althusser struggled to frame a dialectical process devoid of Hegelian inclinations but—as Žižek points out, very correctly—in failing to do so, he is always-already in Hegelian terrain. In this sense the "process without a subject" gains its most consequent form in Žižek's reading of "Substance-Subject." Given this, the question beckons: what if the "process without a subject" is one and the same thing as the Hegelian dialectical process? Žižek is right to have discerned Althusser's paradoxical position: "the Hegelian dialectical process is in fact the most radical version of a "process without a subject" in the sense of an agent controlling and directing the process, be it God or humanity or class as a collective subject."[38] Žižek's consequent and in-depth development of the Hegelian "Substance-Subject" is indeed the full return to Althusser's presupposition, albeit its radical development, that is, ontologization of an anti-ontological position.

"An ideological proposition," according to Althusser, "is a proposition that, while it is the symptom of a reality other than that of which it speaks, is a false proposition to the extent that it concerns the object of which it speaks."[39] Formulating this from Žižek's idea this proposition would take the following form: ideology is not simply a "false consciousness," an illusory representation of reality, it is rather a reality itself which is already to be conceived as "ideological." The "ideological is a social reality whose very existence implies the non-knowledge of its participants as to its essence."[40] In this respect, one should not dismiss the power of ideology as it is not a naïve enterprise. Rather, ideology addresses real problems while distorting possible solutions for them. Let us

turn our attention to the media and cinema in order to analyze the material power of ideology on the dissolution of former Yugoslavia.

Many films have been produced on the successor wars after the disintegration of the country. Jasmin Durakovič's *Nafaka* (2006), perhaps the only serious rival in nastiness to *Welcome to Sarajevo* (Michael Winterbottom, 1997), is one of those clear examples of self-employed racism. The story of *Nafaka* takes place in the beginning of the war in Bosnia in which a young American woman finds herself stranded in Sarajevo. Faced with the "unfathomable reality" of the disintegration of Yugoslavia she perpetually asks herself (and others around her), "Why all this hatred, all this violence?" The enlightening conclusion at which she arrives (with the help of the others, of course) is that this is what happens in this region every 40 to 50 years. The next shot presents her figure to the viewer with particular focus on her confused, or rather, perplexed face. The moral of this story is that even though they are caught in the bloody war, one nevertheless asserts a belief in "nafaka" (roughly translated as destiny or fate), the destiny that was ascribed them by God.

Another example is that of the concept of multi-ethnicity in the Republic of Kosovo. The main form of ideology in this country is represented by "multi-ethnicity." Multi-ethnicity, a Balkan version of multiculturalism, imposed by the West, is the very notion by which the *real* political and economic problems are being covered up. The moment one talks about economic exploitation and corruption as a constitutive element of the state power in Kosovo, political injustice, and so forth, multi-ethnicity is brought up as an counterargument, an effective force of censorship.

A couple of years ago, NATO troops in Kosovo, known as KFOR, issued the infamous billboard all around Kosovo in which a dog and a cat were hugging, which articulated the message, "If they can do it, why can't you?" This stands as the pure example of racism *par excellence* as it leaves aside the disgusting treatment of Albanians and Serbs as animals, liberal multicultural tolerance, as portrayed in KFOR posters. It is here blatantly advertised and reduced as a "natural" co-existence between the cat and a dog. In other words, this is the truth of multi-ethnic tolerance as propagated by the Western powers in this country.

Formulating this in an Althusserian-Žižekian manner, the very notion of "multi-ethnic tolerance" should be rendered problematic and therefore abandoned because of its racist underlying logic. It displaces the *true* political problem into an ethnic one—the problem of domination into a problem of love/tolerance and so forth. In other words, this first aspect is the obfuscation of the true nature of the problem, which is political. Multi-ethnic tolerance serves as a "latent" form of racism. It is easily applied to the Balkans and recently especially toward Kosovo (perhaps, because of the geographical location).[41] In this sense Žižek is right when he writes, "The Balkans constitutes a place of exception with regard to which the tolerant multiculturalist is allowed to act out of his/her repressed racism."

The Althusserian-Žižekian lesson is that, since there is no outside of ideology, the only way to account for political, economic, cultural, media, and other phenomena is through the (almost forgotten art of the) critique of ideology. In this sense the real kernel of social and political problems can be seriously grasped through the demystification of the "false consciousness" that is the supplement/support of the social being itself. With reference to Marx, the existing ideological formations in given societies can be grasped from the point of view of the class struggle as the starting point of ideological analysis qua critique.

Notes

1. This paper is a preliminary overview of an ongoing project. I am grateful to Sead Zimeri for detailed comments on a rough draft.
2. Sead Zimer, *Althusser, sive Žižek*, in *Për Althusserin*, ed. Agon Hamza (Prishtinë, KMD, 2012), 267.
3. In *Lenin Before Hegel*, Althusser reverses Lenin's famous thesis and says that "a century and a half later no one has understood Hegel because it is impossible to understand Hegel without having thoroughly studied and understood 'Capital.'" Louis Althusser, *Lenin Before Hegel,* in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (NLB, London, 2006), 110 Another reversal to be applied here is the following: Thirty-three years later, no one can understand Althusser properly without having thoroughly studied and understood Žižek.
4. Louis Althusser, *A Reply to John Lewis*, in *Essays on Self-Criticism*, trans. Grahame Lock, (NLB, London, 1976), 60.
5. Raymond Aron argues that Althusser has constructed an "imaginary Marxism," see Raymond Aron, *Marxismes imaginaires: d'une sainte familie à l'autre* (Gallimard, Paris, 1970). On this note, Althusser writes, "Yes, I accept I created a Marxist philosophy [that] was different from the vulgar one, but since it provided the reader with a coherent and intelligible interpretation rather than a contradictory one, I thought I had achieved my objective and 'appropriated' Marx by restoring to him what he required: coherence and intelligibility. Moreover, it was the only possible way of 'breaking' the orthodoxy of the disastrous Second International which had given Stalin free rein," Louis Althusser, *The Future Lasts Forever*, trans. Olivier Corpet (New York; New Press, 1995), 221.
6. Louis Althusser, *Marxism and Philosophy: Interviews with Fernanda Navarro, 1984–7*, in *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978–87*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London, Verso, 2006), 288.
7. As Balibar argues, "It seems to me that in reality it is instead an original concept [that] Althusser introduced between 1960 and 1965, a concept [that], it is true, owes 'something' to Bachelard and [that] does indeed rest on certain common philosophical presuppositions but [that] in fact has a quite other object and opens a quite other field of investigations," in Étienne Balibar, "From Bachelard to Althusser: The Concept of 'Epistemological Break,'" *Economy and Society*, vol. 7, no. 3 August 1978, 208.
8. Louis Althusser, *Marxism and Philosophy: Interviews with Fernanda Navarro, 1984–7*, in *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978–87*, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (London, Verso, 2006), 258.

9. Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists* (Verso London, 1997), 81.

10. See Louis Althusser, "A Reply to John Lewis," in *Essays on Self-Criticism*, trans. Grahame Lock (NLB, London, 1976).

11. Althusser, *Philosophy*, 106.

12. Althusser, "Reply to John Lewis," 38. Emphasis added.

13. Gaston Bachelard, *The Formation of Scientific Mind*, trans. Mary McAllester Jones (Clinamen Press, 2002, Manchester), 24.

14. Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (Verso, London, 2009), 17.

15. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 175.

16. Ibid., 181.

17. Louis Althusser, "Marx's Relation to Hegel," in *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster, (London, Verso, 2007), 185.

18. Louis Althusser, *Marx's Relation* to Hegel, 185. On this note, Althusser argues that "for all classical philosophy depends on the categories of subject and object."

19. Louis Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, 175.

20. Louis Althusser, *Reply to John Lewis*, 99.

21. Louis Althusser, "Lenin and Philosophy," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays,* 45.

22. Alain Badiou, *Pocket Pantheon: Figures of Postwar Philosophy*, trans. David Macey (Verso, London, 2009), 64.

23. Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, trans. B. Bray (New York, Columbia University Press, 1997), 301–2.

24. Mladen Dolar, "Beyond Interpellation," *Qui parle*, vol. 6, number 2 (spring/summer 1993), 76.

25. Slavoj Žižek, *Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, Please!* In Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (Verso, London, 2000), 120.

26. Ibid., 115.

27. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (Verso, London, 2008), 43.

28. Robert Pfaller, "Negation and Its Reliabilities: An Empty Subject for Ideology?" in *Cogito and the Unconscious* (Durham Duke University Press, 1988), 240.

29. Ibid., 241.

30. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 175.

31. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979), 19.

32. Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 1993), 30.

33. This is indeed what really differentiates Hegel from Spinoza. I develop the Hegel-Spinoza relation and Hegel's primacy to Spinoza in *Hegel, Althusser and the Critique of Ideology* (dissertation thesis).

34. Adrian Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* (Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 2008), 9.

35. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 10.

36. Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing*, (Verso, London, 2012), 380. Žižek here continues by arguing that Hegel's statement on "Substance as Subject" should thus be read in a way homologous to Lacan's re-reading of Freud's famous formula *wo es war soli ich*

werden, which also should not be interpreted as a demand for the simple subjectiv-ization of the unconscious substance ("I should appropriate my unconscious"), but as the recognition of my place within it, of how the subject exists only through the inconsistency of the unconscious."

37. Ibid.
38. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, xxii.
39. Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists* (Verso London, 1997), 79.
40. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 15.
41. For more on this issue, see, Agon Hamza, "Beyond Independence," in Slavoj Žižek and Agon Hamza, *From Myth to Symptom: The Case of Kosovo* (KMD, Prishtinë, 2013), 82–92.

Student Fantasies: A Žižekian Perspective on the 2012 Quebec Student Uprising

By Louis-Paul Willis

For a vast majority of Quebec's postsecondary students, the year 2012 was most definitely what Slavoj Žižek would call a "year of dreaming dangerously." These students defied a well-established political and social order in their refusal of a drastic—and highly ideological—university tuition hike. Indeed, as it is well known today, the decision by Jean Charest's Liberal government to raise tuition fees led to a massive uprising in the spring of 2012. The recurring protests that accompanied the most important student strike in the province's history, as well as the political and economic discourses that pervaded mediascapes for more than three months, marked a steep division in the public opinion on central questions, such as the role the university should play in Quebec's sociocultural landscape as well as the functioning and funding that should direct such an institution.[1] The most fascinating fact, however, remains the sheer absence of these crucial questions within media discourses and analyses. Of course, mainstream media played a major role in defining the student crisis; however, this role was not one of debate and inquiry, but rather one that centered on the highly ideological admonishing of an entire generation. In the words of Philippe Fournier:

> This young generation of Quebecers, which many had touted as completely apathetic and apolitical, has taken a resolute stand against restricting access to a public good, against the further commodification of knowledge and against the uncompromising law and order approach of an arrogant and irresponsible government.[2]

Indeed the strength, intensity and duration of the 2012 student protests were both surprising and awe inspiring for many, as they literally tore apart the

generalized notion of a generation composed of apathetic youth. Au contraire, "Those [who] have taken the streets day after day and sacrificed their terms and put their professional lives on hold for the students [who] will come after them, have shown extraordinary resilience and bravery."[3]

Amid the overall surprise at the movement itself, the three student union leaders who brought their members to initiate the largest and longest student strike in Quebec history were also the cause of a general bewilderment. While the provincial government backed its proposed tuition hike with an argumentation that, as will be shown here, can be compared to the most blatant form of propaganda, the student union leaders and their acolytes from various professorial and trade unions, research groups, artists, and thinkers brought serious and highly pertinent questions to light. However, equal to the relevance of the arguments brought forth by these actors was the ability displayed by mainstream corporate media to drastically realign the public debate around sensationalist events that proved irrelevant to the actual core of the problem. Student protestors and their union leaders were regularly portrayed as dangerous left-wing anarchists whose actions threatened a stable social equilibrium. From a Žižekian perspective, it appears obvious that the representation of students outlined a cultural fantasy that made possible the veiling of the actual problem. While the students were demonized and portrayed as a threat to the social order, while their symbol—a felt red square—was stigmatized and portrayed as synonymous with violence and intimidation, and while their highly articulated leaders were portrayed as radical leftists, these very portrayals obscured a political and educational system dysfunctional on several levels and nowhere near the values that defined post–Quiet Revolution Quebec.

Although the Quebec student movement is analogous to various contemporary student and popular protests worldwide, this paper aims to study the specificities of media representations that marked what is now known as the "Maple Spring."[4] After having provided a recap of the salient events that marked the 2012 Quebec student crisis, it will be argued that the figure of the student played out as a cultural fantasy for mainstream media—a fantasy that allowed the symbolic rendering of an evasive socio-ideological antagonism similar to the often-noted Žižekian example of the fantasy of the Jew for the anti-Semite. By relying on Žižek's rereading of Lacan, a rereading that further articulates psychoanalytic notions around social, cultural, and political phenomena, the ideological concept of the student as fantasy will be traced around the role media representations played in defining the public debate. Ultimately, beyond its obvious endeavor to provide a critical view of the mainstream media's coverage of the crisis, this paper's aim is twofold: by demonstrating the possible use of the Žižekian critique of ideology for media studies, it will provide an analysis of a contemporary sociocultural debate shaped by highly ideological media fantasies. Given the broad scope implied by this topic, however, it is important to note that this paper will in no way attempt to tackle the significant impact of neoliberalism and advanced capitalism within the crisis.

Origins of the Crisis

Before the 1960s' Quiet Revolution, Quebec's education system was under the control of the Catholic Church. Higher education was almost exclusively available to the upper classes; statistics from 1960 show that only 3 percent of Quebec's francophone population, and 11 percent of its Anglophone population, had access to higher education.[5] While the decades following the end of World War II marked a prosperous and modernizing period in the United States and in English Canada, Quebec's political conservatism and its church's steadfast position on education delayed this modernization and its ensuing secularization.[6] The election of Jean Lesage's Liberal party in June 1960 brought about drastic changes, focused specifically on education and social emancipation—the party's campaign slogan, "Il est temps que ça change" ("It's time for change"), widely announced the drastic social and cultural revolution to come. One of the central missions the Lesage government took on was the democratization of higher education; education was made free from grade school to college, and university tuition fees were set at $540 per year in 1968, with the avowed objective of eventually removing them altogether.[7]

Over time, stable tuition fees were punctuated by sporadic—albeit drastic—increases, and universities were given the right to charge various related fees, so that the tuition fees usually quoted are in fact misleading, as they do not represent the actual cost of studying at the postsecondary level in Quebec. Meanwhile, it is equally important to note the drastic changes that were made to the mode of public funding over these same decades, leading to a system increasingly based on private funding of research as well as a mode of financing that greatly favored fields in the applied sciences, all the while neglecting the arts and humanities—a situation that reflects a neoliberal approach centered exclusively on market value to the neglect of intellectual or emancipatory values. Also, from the early 1970s onward, university funding was based on several parameters, such as an institution's variations in clientele as well as its fixed assets.[8] After several changes made over the decades, it is under the Parti Québécois' governing that Education Minister François Legault introduced a completely new mode of funding in 2001, where an institution's operating budget is solely based on its number of students. This has led to a cannibalistic competition in which off-campus locations have proliferated in an obvious attempt by universities to attract other institutions' clienteles, leading to dubious real-estate projects related to Quebec's universities, among other anomalies.

With all this in mind, one can no doubt fathom the complexity of students' reactions to the drastic tuition hike proposed by Jean Charest's Liberal government. On November 10, 2011, the three major student unions held a protest in Montreal: while 20,000 to 30,000 were present, more that 200,000 students across the province went on strike that day. As of then, student union leaders started mentioning the objective of a general student strike the following

winter. In early February 2012, the first student associations indeed began a strike that rapidly spread; by March 5, more than 123,000 students were on strike. The movement culminated on March 22, when more than 300,000 of the province's 400,000 university-level students were on strike. Between 100,000 and 200,000 of them took to the streets of Montreal in what is now known as one of the most important protests in the city's history. A notable detail to this strike is the fact that students in faculties less known for their propensity to protest voted strikes—faculties such as physics, biology, chemistry, and medicine. The movement kept its intensity well into the spring, with monthly protests every 22nd day of the month and eventually nightly protests in the streets of Montreal. Many external figures and organizations rallied to the student cause over the weeks and months, providing support and arguments for the students' opposition to tuition hikes.[9]

Largely ignoring obvious signs of consensus among parts of Quebec's population against its decision to hike tuition fees, Jean Charest's Liberal government appears to have used the conflict for political and ideological motivations that should be discussed. Indeed, prior to the crisis, Charest's government was attacked on several fronts concerning various and increasing collusion scandals and was dealing with an incredibly strong opposition to many of its social and economic policies. In power since 2003, and in the final year of its current mandate, the Liberal government was facing a harsh election year and was likely to lose the upcoming election to the Pauline Marois-led Parti Québécois. In this respect, one cannot help but notice the incredible coincidence that the student crisis embodies, as it widely diverted public attention from potentially damaging issues. Furthermore, one can only wonder—as many journalists, bloggers and various political commentators have—if the crisis wasn't deliberately left to degenerate.[10] Indeed, the government showed an unusually stubborn and arrogant behavior in light of the gradual unraveling of the crisis. While completely ignoring the increasingly intense student movement well into the winter of 2012, government officials also made decisions that directly contributed to the escalation of tension in Quebec's social and political landscape. One of the most extreme decisions was the adoption of Bill 78, a piece of legislature that drastically restricted citizens' rights to free association and protest, among other things. The bill was severely criticized by various local and international organizations, including Amnesty International and the United Nations.

Ideological Wordplays

Charest's education minister at the time of the rising crisis, Line Beauchamp, encamped most of her interventions around the fact that students needed to pay their "fair share." The idea that students should be expected to pay this fair share rather than rely on state funding in the pursuit of their education sparked numerous debates, most of which were conveniently ignored by

mainstream media and confined to Twitter, Facebook, and blog discussion threads. From a Žižekian perspective, this argument alone represents ideology at its purest: it interpellates individuals around a fantasy notion that completely obfuscates the actual core of its *real*ity. For the hardworking and tax-paying middle class, the idea of further assuming the fragile financial situation of the province's university system was obviously less than appealing; publicly stating that it is time for students to pay their "fair share" could only rally support to governmental postures in the public opinion—particularly that of what Žižek calls the "proletarianized bourgeoisie."[11] Of course, it is incredibly ironic to note that no mention was made of any form of tax relief, which renders the fair share argument completely useless and incredibly deceitful: more money is to be injected into the system by students, who are to pay their share, but it is never even remotely mentioned that the entire principle of Quebec's educational system will be forever changed. In this regard, the "fair share" highly resembles Chomsky's idea of an "empty slogan."[12]

Even more important to note is the utter generational unfairness of the "fair share" argument. Martin and Tremblay-Pépin (2011) adequately show how, had the Liberal Party's tuition hike gone through, a student in 2015 would have had to work more than twice the time as the student in 1978 in order to pay for the required yearly tuition.[13] One can easily fathom how this is completely absent from a simple and populist argument such as that of the "fair share," an argument that conveniently omits the fact that "tuition fees are not the sole source of university funding. Society's more prosperous individuals are asked every year to finance universities through another much more fair and precise route: income taxes."[14] Furthermore, numerous articles and reports were published, even in certain mainstream media, deconstructing Beauchamp's redundant and empty rhetoric. In one instance Michel Girard, *La Presse*'s financial columnist, backed a previous claim of his that low tuition fees were in fact a sound state investment by compiling provincial income tax statistics.[15] He responds to a populist argument—according to which making a nongraduate mass of workers pay for students who will end up earning higher wages is completely abominable—by showing the real breakdown of the public financial burden. Using the then-available 2009 tax year data, he mentions that out of the 6.2 million Quebecers who produced an income tax declaration, only 2.8 million actually paid net income tax—that is, paid more to the state than they received in various tax relief incentives. Thus, 45 percent of Quebec's taxpayers actually contributed to the $16.9 billion in tax revenues. While taxpayers earning between $30,000 and $49,999 a year assumed 21 percent of this amount (although they represent 23.1 percent of taxpayers), citizens earning between $50,000 and $99,999 assumed 47 percent of the province's tax revenues (they represent 18.1 percent of the population); ultimately, while the 250,000 Quebecers that earn above $100,000 a year represent 4.1 percent of the province's population, they assumed 41 percent of

tax revenues for the year 2009.[16] Girard goes on to argue that once students graduate and integrate into the workforce, they are likely to earn considerably more than someone without a higher education, thus contributing more to overall state revenue.[17] In short, the true "fair share" of students benefitting from an accessible university education is the future contributions they will make to society—contributions that, incidentally, go far beyond the simple economic implications discussed here.

Now that the fair share argument has been revealed as a lure, one can easily ask what this lure masks. To what advantage did Charest's government deliberately let the crisis spin out of control, using empty slogans such as the one discussed, all the while spitefully sparking debates about the student strike actually being a boycott and attempting to break student unity by refusing to include certain unions in projected discussions?[18] I have previously hinted at the political gain that was to be earned by sidetracking public attention away from the various crises that afflicted the Liberal government by late 2011 and early 2012. While it appears highly plausible that Charest's Liberals did indeed use the student crisis as a cover from much more heated issues, the crisis also sparked numerous social antagonisms that support the claim that it was, above all, ideological. In this vein, it is highly interesting to note that, the day following the protest held on November 10, 2011, the Government of Quebec purchased several student protest-related keywords on Google, allowing the promotion of its version of the facts to the disadvantage of the student movement.[19] It is also important to note the intrinsic links between the lesser prohike student movement—known as the green squares—and Charest's Liberal Party.[20]

The Fantasmatic Student

While a tense yet mostly constructive debate raged on in independent and social media during the winter and spring of 2012—a debate that, among other things, covered issues discussed so far in this paper—Quebec's mainstream media provided an incredibly hollow portrait of the situation, focusing its coverage mostly on the protests that took place, emphasizing their sensationalism. The media coverage itself has sparked several debates and various studies since the crisis. Most of these studies aim to determine how the crisis was covered and whether there were any serious biases and/or violations to journalism ethics. Of course, these studies attempt to provide empirical evaluations of the contents and substance of mainstream media's coverage. While they provide valuable information, they nevertheless omit important discussions pertaining to ideology and its articulation through the media. Using the data produced by these studies, the remainder of this chapter will attempt to read information on the mainstream media's representation of the crisis in order to further emphasize its ideological underpinnings.

One of the most stunning facets of the media's rendering of the situation in Quebec during the winter and spring of 2012 is the demonizing of the figure

of the student—a demonizing that functions precisely along the lines of the fantasy of the Jew for the anti-Semite, an example that Žižek often relies upon to delimit the ideological functioning of the cultural fantasy. As early on in his œuvre as in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek explores the notion of a "cultural," or ideological, fantasy that supports a given social reality. In the first chapter on Marx and the symptom, he introduces the concept of fantasy into the task of ideology critique, noting among other things how the "fundamental level of ideology . . . is not that of an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself."[21] In so doing, Žižek provides an important contribution to media studies, as he makes available a cultural version of the Lacanian notion of fantasy ($\$ \lozenge a$). This notion of a social or a cultural fantasy is implied by ideology as a form of imagined pre-ideological enjoyment where various social antagonisms are absent.[22] Žižek leads us towards an ideology critique aimed not at a purely discursive deconstructionist approach, but rather one aimed at the traversal of the various social and cultural fantasies that allow ideology to function. He argues that the criticism of ideology should aim "to detect, in a given ideological edifice, the element which represents within it its own impossibility."[23] Turning to his habitual example of the figure of the Jew for the anti-Semite, Žižek adds:

> Society is not prevented form achieving its full identity because of Jews: it is prevented by its own antagonistic nature, by its own immanent blockage, and it "projects" this internal negativity into the figure of the "Jew."[24]

Through Žižek's thought, one can grasp how the figure of the Jew occupies the function of fantasy ($\lozenge$) in an ideological application of Lacan's formula ($\$ \lozenge a$). Of course, the figure of the Jew is an example that can easily be replaced by any other socially or culturally produced imagoes that aim to conceal the various antagonisms that remain at the core of a given socio-symbolic order.

How can we recuperate this Žižekian approach to ideology critique in order to decipher the events of 2012 and, most importantly, their coverage within Quebec's mainstream media? It appears obvious, from a Lacanian/Žižekian vantage point, that a gross generalization of the figure of the contesting student allowed mainstream media to center its focus on what it made out to be *the* cause of social turmoil. A front-page inventory of the four major Montreal newspapers,[25] from February 2012 to June 2012, provides an interesting glimpse at the ideological alignment of these news sources, as well as their role in structuring a fantasy-image of the student. Influence Communication, a Montreal-based media information broker that specializes in monitoring, summarizing and proving analyses of various media, published such an overview.[26] This study provides highly interesting data, such as the fact that of the 67.48 percent front-pages that included photos, 45.32 percent showed signs of violence; when observing the breakdown of these statistics over the specifics of each of Montreal's four daily newspapers, their ideological alignment becomes resolutely

obvious. One of the most notorious examples dates to March 23, 2012, the day following one of the most important protests in Montreal, as well as the historic threshold where approximately 75 percent of Quebec's university students were on strike. While *Le Devoir*'s front page displayed a long-shot photo of the huge protest with the title "200 000 fois 'entendez-nous!'" ("200 000 times 'hear us!'"), *La Presse*'s front page showed a similar photo with the title "100 000 non!" ("100 000 times no!"). Meanwhile, the *Journal de Montréal* showed a medium-shot photo with the surprising title "Les étudiants perdent des appuis" ("Students losing support"). The huge discrepancies within the provided information did not go unnoticed, and sparked heated debates in various traditional and social media. In a similar fashion, *La Presse*'s May 19 publication of a poll showing that a majority of Quebecers agreed with the government's hardline approach—a poll that suggested approval of bill 78, which had, in fact, been conducted before the contents of the legislation were made public—generated steep indignation at the obvious bias within the publication's editorial lines. Along with numerous other instances of blatant biases within printed media, these examples support the criticism of traditional media that arose in 2012. In a panel presentation held at the Quebec Federation of Professional Journalists' Congress, Laval University's Centre d'études sur les medias (Center for the Study of Media) showed that the *Journal de Montréal* and *The Gazette* provided a highly oriented coverage at the disadvantage of the student movement, while *La Presse* provided a relatively oriented coverage at the disadvantage of the student movement, leaving *Le Devoir* as the only daily publication to provide a relatively oriented coverage that advantaged the student movement.[27] This same research center held focus groups over the summer of 2012; the ensuing report shows a relative distrust towards the mainstream media's coverage of the events.[28] While these various studies provide valuable insight on the obvious biases that afflict mainstream media, they leave little room for an ideological analysis of these biases.

In order to fully grasp the media construction of a social fantasy within the figure of the student, attention must be paid to how the discussed biases actually operated, and how they presented an imaginary portrayal of students and, even more specifically, of student leaders. The most blatant example relies on the media rendering of Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, one of the spokespeople for the Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (ASSÉ) at the time of the strike. While the two other student unions centered their attention on maintaining Quebec's infamously low tuition fees, ASSÉ's objective has always been the complete eradication of tuition fees. In order to form a coherent and unified front vis-à-vis the Charest government, student unions agreed to center their demands around maintaining current tuition fees. This did not prevent ASSÉ, through Nadeau-Dubois and its other spokesperson, Jeanne Reynolds, from openly admitting their long-term agenda encompassed the struggle for a free higher education in Quebec; nor did it prevent a vast majority of mainstream media from representing Nadeau-Dubois, as well as ASSÉ, as dangerous left-wing anarchists.

ASSÉ's photographic presence in most news media played a major role in defining a fantasmatic notion of the student as "an external element, a foreign body introducing corruption into the sound social fabric."[29] Indeed, when scrutinizing the pictures of both Nadeau-Dubois and Reynolds that appeared in the aforementioned Montreal-based newspapers, the fantasmatic structure becomes obvious: the photos mostly show the student leaders in an aggressive posture, with the exception of certain issues of *Le Devoir*—a notorious example being the May 26 edition that showed Nadeau-Dubois being hugged by Anarchopanda, a college philosophy professor dressed as a mascot who played an original role during most student and popular protests. The imagoes produced by media renderings of the two ASSÉ spokespeople deeply contrast with the fact that both are exemplary and highly decorated students. While to some extent most media provided a fairly neutral portrayal of these student leaders through various interviews and personality presentations, the images they provided—almost always negative and with connoted aggressiveness—obviously contributed to defining them as rogue elements in a stable social equilibrium, at least on an imaginary level.

The number of media occurrences that incarnate the functioning of an ideological fantasy in the representation not only of the mentioned student leaders, but of the student movement in general, reaches far beyond any grasp this paper can attempt to possess. There are, however, certain incidents that received widespread attention and that can easily be conceived as catalysts for the much broader phenomenon of the weaving of a highly functional fantasy of the anarchist, radical, and dangerous student.

One of the most notorious incidents is a tweet posted by Richard Martineau, a populist columnist for the *Journal de Montréal*: on March 20, 2012, he wrote, "Seen on an Outremont terrace: 5 students with red squares, eating, drinking sangria and talking on cell phones. Living the Good life!"[30] While Martineau's integrity as a journalist was severely attacked by various student groups and intellectuals, including UQAM professor Normand Baillargeon,[31] his grossly generalized portrayal of the student movement undoubtedly coincided with what the working class and middle class needed to receive. In a tacit reference to the groundwork established in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek convincingly recalls the basic structuring of ideology around a central fantasy in *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, where he notes that

> The standard way of disavowing an antagonism and presenting one's own position as the representation of the All is to project the cause of the antagonism onto a foreign intruder who stands for the threat to society as such, for the anti-social element, for its excremental excess.[32]

In this particular tweet, as within many articles and various texts and photos relating the events, protests, and confrontations that took place during the 2012 Quebec student crisis, the basic functioning of ideology—that

is, the defining of a social fantasy that obfuscates very real social and class antagonisms—remains decidedly obvious: the student is made out to be the scapegoat for the unprecedented social unrest that took place. Meanwhile, the fact that "[t]he true 'foreign body' that cannot be assimilated is . . . the infernal self-propelling machine of capital itself"[33] remains inherently silenced, despite its threat to ideals fundamental in Quebec's society.

Ultimately, through the "pumping out [of] disinformation, twist[ed] statistics and . . . inflammatory editorials,"[34] the corporatist media outlets that provide Quebec with its mainstream mediascape successfully distanced their discourses from the core of the debate that took place in 2012. While endlessly hammering vague and shallow arguments such as that of the fair share, Charest's Liberal government and its media acolytes managed to conveniently avoid discussing the crucial changes that were to be brought into Quebec's social and cultural fabric, as well as the refuting of values that date to the Quiet Revolution. Following the adoption of Bill 78 by Charest's government, Anonymous leaked a DVD titled *DVD Gouverne(mental)*, a two-hour home movie made in 2008 at a private party for the wife of Power Corporation CEO Paul Desmarais. Premier Jean Charest appears among the invitees, along with former prime ministers of Canada Jean Chrétien and Brian Mulroney, former president of the United States George H. Bush, and many other renowned guests. The objective behind Anonymous's leaking of this video is decidedly Lacanian/Žižekian: proof is provided of the Master's access to unrestricted enjoyment through the depiction of an endlessly sumptuous birthday party, where entertainment is provided by internationally renowned artists and where there is no limit to consumption. One can easily ponder the power of social and cultural fantasies, as the expected indignation upon Anonymous's leaked DVD never occurred. Žižek is undoubtedly correct when he states that "the middle class is against politicization—it just wants to maintain its way of life, to be left to work and live in peace, which is why it tends to support authoritarian coups that promise to put an end to the crazy political mobilization of society."[35] Such an assumption is all the more reason to follow through with a Žižekian-oriented ideological criticism of contemporary media and to keep on "dreaming dangerously."

Notes

1. It is important to note here that the contemporary Quebec University system is relatively recent and is founded on values that were central to the 2012 student strike: accessible and quality education for everyone who so desires it. These values date to the 1960s and to what is known as the Quiet Revolution.

2. Philippe Fournier, "It's Really Kicking Off in Quebec," *The Disorder of Things*, May 25, 2012, http://thedisorderofthings.com/2012/05/25/its-really-kicking-off-in-quebec/

3. Ibid.

4. This term results from the translation of a play of words, as the French term "print-emps érable" has a homophonic proximity to the term "printemps arabe," or Arab Spring.

5. McCord Museum, "L'éducation au Québec avant et après la réforme Parent," 2013, http://www.musee-mccord.qc.ca/scripts/explore.php?Lang=2&tableid=11&tablen ame=theme&elementid=107__true&contentlong (accessed July 25, 2013).

6. Ibid.

7. Of course, comparing the costs of education in the 1960s with today poses quite a challenge. In a detailed report that disputes 8 arguments related to the proposed tuition hike, the Institut de recherche et d'informations socio-économiques (IRIS), a Montreal-based independent research institute, compares university tuition fees at different moments in time with the minimum wage effective at that time. This computation allows the report's authors, Éric Martin and Simon Tremblay-Pépin, to provide the number of full-time weeks working at minimum wage required to pay tuition fees. Their report shows that in 1978, 4 weeks of full-time work at a minimum wage of $3.37/hour were necessary to pay the tuition fees at that time. In comparison, 6.7 weeks of full-time work at a minimum wage of $9.65/hour were necessary in 2012. Had Jean Charest's Liberal Party managed to impose its projected tuition hike, 8.8 weeks of full-time work at a projected minimum wage of $12.00/hour would have been necessary to pay for a student's tuition fees in 2015 (Martin and Tremblay-Pépin 2011, 13).

8. Richard Fecteau, *Le financement des universities hors Québec. Étude comparative*, Conference des Associations d'Étudiants et Étudiantes de l'Université Laval (CADEUL), 2002, http://www.cadeul.com/sites/default/files/Le%20financement% 20des%20universités%20hors%20Québec.pdf (accessed July 25, 2013).

9. Many Quebec artists, musicians, and actors showed support to the student cause over the winter and spring months. Independent research groups such as IRIS and the Institut de recherche en économie contemporaine (IRÉC) published various reports and studies demonstrating the importance of maintaining low tuition fees and even that of eliminating them altogether. Various unions also rallied support to the student protest, among them Quebec's two main workforce unions (FTQ and CSN), as well as virtually every union and organization representing college and university professors and professionals. One student from Montreal's Concordia University wrote an email to Noam Chomsky, asking what his thoughts were on the student strike; in his response, Chomsky notably mentions that "High tuition is not an economic necessity, as is easy to show, but a debt trap is a good technique of indoctrination and control" (Noam Chomsky, quoted in *Le Canard déchaîné*, March 20, 2012, http://canarddechaine.wordpress.com/2012/03/20/chomsky-repond-etudiants-quebe/).

10. See for instance Patrick Lagacé, "La Queue du Chien," *La Presse*, April 26, 2012, http://www.lapresse.ca/debats/chroniques/patrick-lagace/201204/26/01-4519042-la-queue-du-chien.php

11. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, 7–18.

12. Noam Chomsky, *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda, 2nd Edition* (Vancouver, BC: Open Media, 2002), 26.

13. Eric Martin and Simon Tremblay-Pépin, *Faut-il vraiment augmenter les frais de scolarité?* 17.

14. Ibid., 17–18. My translation.

15. Michel Girard, "Combien ça rapporte, un diplômé?" *La Presse*, April 2, 2012, http://affaires.lapresse.ca/opinions/chroniques/michel-girard/201204/02/01-4511564-combien-ca-rapporte-un-diplome.php

16. Of course, much could be said on the incredible financial burden laid onto the lower-middle class, as well as its ideological implications, a task Žižek takes up in *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*. While this precise argument isn't the focus of this paper, suffice it to mention that the redundant fair share argument necessarily obfuscates the financial imbalance within the tax structure, an imbalance that is of great advantage to the neoliberal right, while it also pushes the working lower-middle class to buy into such empty arguments.

17. This argument is actually based on a statistic bulletin published by Quebec's Ministry of Education in December 2008, http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/publications/SICA/DRSI/BulletinStatistique38_f.pdf.]

18. The Charest government refused to include the ASSÉ at a projected negotiation table on the surrealist basis that the association condoned "violence and intimidation," an expression Premier Charest blatantly overused to describe student demeanor while refusing to discuss the extremely repressive violence displayed by various police forces.

19. Vincent Larouche, "Québec achète 'grève étudiante' sur Google," *La Presse*, November 11, 2011, http://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/education/201111/11/01-4466986-quebec-achete-greve-etudiante-sur-google.php

20. See Marc Allard, "Des liens dénoncés avec le PLQ," *Le Soleil*, February 24, 2012, 13; Émilie Bilodeau, "Groupes étudiants favorables à la hausse: les associations croient à une intervention politique," *La Presse*, February 24, 2012, A3.

21. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 30.

22. Ibid, 139–140.

23. Ibid, 143.

24. Ibid.

25. These four newspapers are the populist *Journal de Montréal* (owned by Québecor), *The Gazette*, an Anglophone and relatively conservative publication owned by Postmedia Network, *La Presse*, a francophone and mostly liberal-oriented publication owned by Power Corporation of Canada, and *Le Devoir*, an independently-owned publication known to favor Quebec's independence as well as various leftist perspectives.

26. Influence Communication, *Conflit étudiant—Analyse des premières pages (unes) des quotidiens* La Presse*, Le Journal de Montréal*, Le Devoir et* The Gazette, *15 février et le 9 juin 2012*, July 2012, http://www.influencecommunication.com/sites/default/files/Rapport_UNES_Étudiants_JUILLET_2012.pdf

27. Centre d'études sur les médias, *Les journaux ont-ils été plus critiques à légard d'un camp?* Congrès de la FPJQ, 2012, http://www.cem.ulaval.ca/pdf/FPJQ17nov2012.pdf (accessed July 30, 2013).

28. Centre d'études sur les médias, *Les médias et la crise étudiante*, http://www.cem.ulaval.ca/pdf/SyntheseGroupesdediscussion.pdf (accessed July 30, 2013).

29. Slavoj Žižek, *Sublime Object*, 142.

30. Richard Martineau, Twitter post, March 20, 2012, https://twitter.com/RiMartineau/status/182294754044813312. My translation. Original text: "Vu sur une terrasse à Outremont: 5 étudiants avec carré rouge, mangeant, buvant de la sangria et parlant au cellulaire. La belle vie!"

It should be noted here that Outremont is an extremely wealthy neighborhood in Montreal, an element that provides added connotation to Martineau's tweet, as it suggests that the students drinking sangria and using cellphones could most likely easily absorb the proposed tuition hike instead of profiting from the hardworking taxpayer's dollar.

31. See, for instance, Normand Baillargeon, "Argumentation 101, avec Richard Martineau," *Voir*, April 2, 2012, http://voir.ca/normand-baillargeon/2012/04/02/argumentation-101-avec-richard-martineau/

32. Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, 23.

33. Ibid, 35.

34. Philippe Fournier, "It's Really Kicking Off in Quebec."

35. Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, 24.

The Objective: The Configuration of Trauma in the "War on Terror," or the Sublime Object of the Medium

By Richard Bégin

In 2008, Daniel Myrick directed the sci-fi film *The Objective*. It tells the story of a small group of Special Ops reservists on a mission in a hostile region of Afghanistan. Their mission, headed by a "scientific" agent from the CIA, is to investigate strange energy fluctuations in the Afghan desert, which are said to have been detected by American spy satellites. On the ground, the fluctuations can be felt but remain invisible to the naked eye. Their presence causes thermal variations that can be made visible only by the CIA agent's infrared camera. The device translates the fluctuations into images of more or less anthropomorphic spectral shapes. The shapes appear on the camera's screen, thus allowing us to get an idea of that which, apparently, threatens the group of reservists. We learn, moreover, that the meaning of these shapes can be explained by a mysterious and mystical character, but he has disappeared. Does he even exist? Regardless, the group hopes to find him in the desert and thus obtain precious information about the nature of these odd fluctuations. Aside from a passing reference made to a phenomenon that Alexander the Great witnessed in the same region in 329 B.C.—namely the appearance in the sky of large silver armors—little is said about the fluctuations, apart from the fact that they are a potential threat to U.S. security.

We gather from this underlying narrative that the true interest of the film resides in this abstract menace. Because it is invisible to both the man of science and the armed forces, the threat expresses the fallible nature of a technology-driven social structure that is meant to be concrete and rational. More

specifically, the invisibility of the threat in itself emphasizes the inherent lack within a modern Western Symbolic order, a lack that technology is believed to overcome. It is, in this case, a lack within the visual field. The reservists embody this faulty order, which comes up against its own incapacity to explain and envision; an incapacity that, in turn, produces traces of the inexpressible that the order aims simultaneously to counter and deny. In this way, the threat becomes, for the Symbolic structure that faces it, a self-generated dread-inducing prospect. The structure, or the group of reservists that embody it, is a fitting representation of post-9/11 American society as we may understand it: a modern and rational society, united but terrified to the core by the fantasy of an invisible, hidden, and indiscoverable enemy. *The Objective* evokes this anxiety and makes it the subject of its narrative, while the anxiety's object is expressed through the narrative of the fantasy. It is conveyed symptomatically through the terror experienced by the members of the expedition as they go through the desert—or what might be better described as *going through the fantasy*. It may be recalled that fantasy is, according to Lacan, a screen masking the Real. The film's desert space is a place both mystical and spectral, in short, fantasmatic, literally "inhabited" by a force that masks the true anxiety—that of the inexpressible. Herein lies the very nature of the Real, and it is only by going through the traumatic anxiety—and the desert—that the subject can come to understand and to conceive, in short, to see his objective.

The Objective was filmed after the W. Bush administration launched its own "objective" following the inconceivable 9/11: to wage a "war on terror." The film does not, explicitly, tell the story of this "war," but it nevertheless exposes its implacable logic, that of a combatant faced with an invisible enemy. The war, its objective, and its invisible enemy create their own kind of fantasy screen made of paranoia, imaginary enemies, and suspicion. Despite the impasse such a screen suggests, it nevertheless foretells the possibility of going through it, as does the CIA agent, in a final redemptive act. Indeed, at the end of the film, the agent is delivered from his infrared device and the equipment he possesses—and by which he is possessed—and meets an entity that will transform him forever. Is he still human after this meeting? This "going through" is equivalent to Lacan's notion of *the pass*, which allows the subject, following Žižek's reading of Lacan, to attain the Real, in this case, the inexpressible, true object of the threat. In this paper, I intend to demonstrate that *The Objective* presents a traumatic configuration of terror by telling the story of individuals who go through the fantasmatic—and ideological—impasse that results from fighting a war without an adversary.

The Objective

Daniel Myrick's film is aptly named. The main characters of *The Objective* do indeed have an "objective" to reach. In fact, the entire narrative revolves around their objective that is, to say the least, vague and imprecise. This is because

the object of the quest remains unattainable, invisible, and inexpressible. The subject's desire to reach it is the sole object of the narrative. This desire is, however, "objectified" by the medium—the infrared camera, true protagonist of the story. Indeed, only the medium seems capable of seeing the object that began the quest. In this way, the desire itself becomes an object represented via the medium, an iconic object, whereas the other object, the one that caused the desire in the first place, remains unrepresentable. The narrative thus makes this unrepresentable object the source of a desire that is, in itself, presentable, and that becomes by the very fact the only true story to tell—which shows that the goal of the enterprise is less important than the journey undertaken to reach it. The situation would probably have been different if the film were entitled *The Object*, because the objective is not the object in itself, but rather a more or less vague target toward which an operation is directed. Hence, the operation in this case, though well defined, expresses an unfulfilled desire, the object of which is truly revealed only once the quest is complete, once the desert has been crossed. It may be said, then, that the operation cannot be completed as long as the object remains unattainable. In Daniel Myrick's film, the object is a fantasy that is truly revealed only when the one who reaches it is no longer of our world—that is, the world made of illusions and fantasies outside of which the objective itself loses all meaning.

The Objective is thus the story of a desire, and as is always the case with desire, the one who experiences it is also put to the test. This is why Daniel Myrick's film is, above all, the story of an initiatory journey. The characters exist only in relation to their quest. They are characters defined solely by their mission. The deadly trials to which they are subjected, each in turn, are nothing but the concrete signs of an operation doomed to fail, notably because the very impossibility of the operation lies in the immaterial nature of its object. Therefore, as the characters fail to track an enemy in the flesh, they are left to confront the anxiety inherent to the search. This is because the object of the operation is an enemy only once it is dreaded, hunted, and captured, in other words, once it materializes. As the enemy does not materialize, the agonizing nature of the mission turns against the subject of the operation, who is left alone with the fear and the anxiety related to his stalk. The lack of belligerents thus proves, for the subject of the operation, to be an endlessly delayed encounter with a self-imposed object. We understand, in fact, that the essential meaning Lacan gives to the *objet a* lies in this endlessly delayed encounter. We can take this idea a step further by stating that the persistence of this continual and essential postponement, in a modern life focused on process, evolution, and progress, is what makes the modern subject a traumatized subject. But the trauma must remain manageable if the subject is to avoid sinking into neurosis and paranoia. Herein lies the role of the media, which is to produce its fantasmatic and—to say the least—ideological solution.

The Objective reminds us that humans not only invented technology, but that technology also shapes humanity. Confronted with an impossible operation,

the subject can always count on technology to remedy any human defect that may make the operation impossible. If the enemy cannot be captured, we can nevertheless capture the energy that enemy emits or record its invisible presence. The camera used by the CIA agent possesses this apparently redemptive character: it allows the subject to see the object of the operation—at least, that is what we are led to believe. The camera in this case is a medium that seems to fill a void; it allows the subject to picture the enemy, and, by the same token, it artificially makes the agent the "one who knows." The medium is what appears to make the operation possible. Thus, it offers a "solution"—configuring the trauma of terror, that is, managing it through iconicity.

This iconicity does not, of course, amount to representation—we really do not end up seeing much—but it nevertheless lends an image to the threat. In this way, following the logic of a redemptive technology, the film appears to solve a human defect, when, in fact, it only reinforces it. The threat remains very real. What the technology does, rather, is transform the object's inaccessibility into a media phenomenon. In other words, technology does not save humanity; instead, it mediatizes our anxieties through the process of figuration. It serves only to objectify fear and, in fact, desire. Technology thus also engenders humanity insofar as we become terrorized by our own images.

Several horror films are based on the idea that resorting to iconicity solves nothing, but rather reinforces in the subject the sense that something is lacking. *Paranormal Activity* is an example of this. Like many other films, it only turns the "failure to see" into a media phenomenon that is infinitely scarier because it produces the invisible.

By producing the invisible, the media extends the trauma of the unattainable object by integrating it into the order of fantasy. It is this fantasmatic integration of the trauma, in other words, its figuration, that enables to manage and, by the same token, to generate terror. The success of a film such as *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), also directed by Daniel Myrick, stems from this traumatic configuration of terror. In this case, there is no camera allowing the subjects to get a better look at the threat. The camera only serves to make the subjects' inability to see and, consequently, to defend themselves more agonizing. In this sense, it extends the trauma of a subject incapable of reaching the object causing desire, Lacan's *objet a*. The camera manages, thus, the incapacity on an iconic level. This is how it produces the invisible. Daniel Myrick therefore grants a power and an effectiveness to the medium that is quite different from that granted to it by common technophile discourses. The medium in this case does not solve anything, quite on the contrary. The medium in fact only mediatizes. But what exactly does it mediatize? Not the object of the quest, but rather the process that brings the subject closer to it. In *The Objective*, when the CIA agent points his infrared camera toward a thermal fluctuation, all we see on the screen are anthropomorphic shapes of a reddish hue. The screen thus only extends the anxiety caused by the shapeless and the inexpressible on an iconic level. And even if the camera had afforded a clear picture of the object,

this "view" would have remained the symptom of a human incapacity to imagine, without the help of an apparatus, the object causing desire.

An Ideological Apparatus

Using Jean-Luc Godard's words, I will state that the image in question is not a just image of the object, but rather it is always *just* an image. The essence of the traumatic configuration of terror lies in the adverb used by Godard. The CIA agent does not see the object of the threat; he sees *only* its image. The object thus perceived is a media product, indeed a social object. Therefore, the camera does not mediatize the object of the threat; rather it translates on an iconic level the drive to see, and consequently, the trauma associated with this drive.

We can view this as a true experience of modernity insofar as the medium *is* the phenomenon: a phenomenon that derives its meaning—that of its unrepresentability—from the techno-iconic object, the image, produced by the apparatus. Hence, instead of producing a redemptive iconicity that would allow the subject to go through the fantasy, the apparatus in turn acts as a screen masking the Real. By producing the invisible, the technological device feeds the fantasy of the inexpressible rather than making a breach toward the representable. The entire reality of the operation is engulfed in the fantasy. Thus, the "reality" presented by *The Objective* is actually generated by a media fantasy. Reality and fantasy are one, which, according to Žižek, is true of any reality: "[F]antasy is on the side of reality: it is, as Lacan said, the support that gives consistency to what we call 'reality.'"[1] And because "'Reality' is a fantasy-construction which enables us to mask the Real of our desire,"[2] we are not surprised to see the CIA agent reach the object causing desire only once the fantasy-generating technological apparatus is no longer functional. By freeing himself from the medium, the subject is freed from the fantasy.

This deliverance is demonstrated at the very end of the film by a shot in which the CIA agent appears to no longer be of this world. The final scene is very telling. Following his encounter with an entity—the *objet a*—the CIA agent finds himself in a dark room, literally floating in the air under the attentive and curious gaze of a few high-ranking military officers. It is difficult to imagine a finer metaphor to express the impossible contact between those who remain moored to the fantasy and those who have freed themselves. The scene moreover demonstrates the illusory character of reality, as well as the fantasmatic nature of ideology. Because the desert, before it is "gone through," is also the place where an ideology is carried out. In this case, the ideology is of a political and military nature, such as that underlying a war on terror. This "war" results from a reality specific to the post-9/11 world, in which the enemy is invisible and the conflict is devoid of contact. This double absence serves a new kind of military ideology, according to which the enemy is an absence that must be fought. Fighting the invisible has inevitably become the distinctive feature of a political and military ideology crucial to a society whose

reality remains haunted by the unseen and the unknown. The ideology's function then is to make such a reality bearable. According to Žižek , once again:

> Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction [that] serves as a support for our "reality" itself: an "illusion" [that] structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel. The function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel.[3]

The infrared camera used by the CIA agent is, in this sense, of crucial importance to the narrative. To fight the invisible, it must first be produced. The medium is part of an ideology that transforms the conflict's impossibility, and thus the traumatic fascination with its object, into an imaginary and symbolic quest. Here, the media takes on a central, founding ideological role, that of making a reality driven by the unseen and the unknown bearable to the subject. It makes this reality bearable, on the one hand, by becoming the special tool of an imaginary quest—it produces the image of the threat—and, on the other hand, by providing this quest with an object. The symbolic nature of the medium comes into play in this production of the object that gives the mission its meaning and its raison d'être. The medium thus becomes that which supports the reality, and proves, as a consequence, to be a highly effective ideological apparatus.

The media supports this reality by playing an ideological role that is expressed in the form of mourning. The manner in which the CIA agent insistently points his camera in the direction of the unseen in order to bring it to the realm of iconicity symptomatically reveals a mournful intent, that of visually integrating the absence into reality despite the dread it engenders. Such an integration is part of the mourning process, that is, of the attempt by a subject to incorporate into the Imaginary and Symbolic order of reality a "force"—in this case, death—that highlights the subject's vulnerable and fallible nature. To come to terms with loss therefore consists of introducing the absence into a fantasmatic reality where death nevertheless possesses meaning on an Imaginary (the sense of an elsewhere) and/or Symbolic (the lack to which one must become accustomed, or make customary) level. This attempt, however, is doomed to fail, for the simple reason that the subject is brought to build through the very process of acceptance an imaginary—therefore *affective*—and symbolic—therefore *effective*—order, in which the *something* that is mourned will always be lacking. The inevitably failed encounter with this something that persists, and that is staged by the Imaginary and Symbolic order of representation, is what Žižek, in his reading of Lacan, terms the Real. The "something" that insists for want of existing is a product of trauma insofar as it is a "residue" essential to representation. It acts as a constant reminder to representation, like its illegitimate child. Yet, it is its child all the same. In this perspective, the

CIA agent not only seeks to visualize the unseen, he also engenders a figuration of the Real in the form of a lack he will never completely come to terms with, unless he goes through it.

The Objective thus presents a modernist critique of the technological apparatus. In this case, the device is indeed the object that leads the subject to believe it is possible to remedy an inherently human void. This modern pharmacology requires that the technological object be granted a redemptive character. Yet, as we have seen, the camera does not allow the subject to remedy a lack, it accentuates man's vulnerability by highlighting his own incapacity. If we believed that technology remedied something, we would rather be forced to admit that it only re-mediates, indeed *remediatizes* incapacity. While proving to be the remedy to something, technology is the poison that indicates that there is in fact *something*, and that this something persists. In this manner, the apparatus is involved in establishing the trauma. Following the etymological meaning of the word, we could say that the apparatus is that which "prepares" the lack. The apparatus causes man's incapacity to appear. This is true both of the technological and the ideological apparatus.

To demonstrate this, let us consider the effects of the 9/11 attacks on American society. For quite a while, these remained devoid of meaning. Not that they were, in themselves, nonsensical. Rather, they were the object of a process carried out by a state ideological apparatus, the aim of which was to break down meaning. Faced with an invisible enemy, the state had every interest in producing *something* like an adversary as nonsensical as its actions. Its name would be "evil." Its unrepresentability would be its strength, as well as that of an ideological apparatus that would be free to conflate the global or domestic threat with a figure of terror: the terrorist. The W. Bush administration's war on terror is entirely based on this logic. The ideological apparatus produces its own inexpressible object, and in so doing, establishes the trauma of the invisible. The apparatus generates the invisible in its own interest, and like our agent's camera, it captures nothing. We cannot capture terrorism, we can only kill or imprison the figures that represent it. And yet, behind such figures, something, insistently, persists: the threat.

The ideological apparatus produces the terrorist threat, and, in so doing, highlights the persistence of a Real within an Imaginary and Symbolic order that has thus been "prepared." The terrorist figures born of this preparation of the threat, therefore, become the result of a fantasmatic process. It is this process, in my view, that lends meaning to the long and painful journey through the desert in Myrick's film. The group is, of course, on a mission, but it also embodies the subject of an ideological state apparatus, a subject condemned to believe what he is told or to imagine what he is shown. The subject is "at war" with an enemy created for him; to picture this enemy, he needs an apparatus, whether technological or ideological. The capture becomes humanly impossible, and coming to terms with the void proves an unending process. Such is the logic behind the war on terror. This does not mean, however, that there are

no enemies, quite on the contrary. By seeking to fight the invisible, and by the same token, to catch hold of it, the apparatus produces a belligerent force that is defined by its elusiveness. In other words, the enemy *is* the lack. But not just any lack, rather the lack in relation to which we may identify ourselves, the one that establishes us as a subject of the apparatus. The subject engendered by the lack is therefore also, potentially, the subject of the Real. It is only by going through the fantasy—in this case, the desert—that this subject may encounter that of which he is truly the product. The final scene of the film can be interpreted thus. The agent reaches a state of absolute well-being because he is not only delivered from the apparatus, but also from the terror it created. To free oneself from the apparatus is therefore also to free oneself from the trauma.

The Enigma of Terror

Let us go back to the desert, because, before going through it, the subject must be put to the test. Terror is engendered by the apparatus, because it refuses—or is unable—to give the threat tangible form. The object of the threat is never personified; all we see is the media object—its appearance. It is this lack of an object that causes terror. The actual presence of the object would create a climate of fear. This is the difference suggested by Jacques Rancière[4] between terror and fear; it is one we must dwell on if we wish to understand the full scope of the configuration of trauma in a war on terror. According to Rancière, terror is a mode of perception, unlike fear, which results from a tangible threat expressed by an embodied belligerent. Herein lies the full meaning of terrorism, which exists only when the invisible becomes a mode of perception. Terror is therefore quite different from fear. Fear always establishes and localizes its object of meaning: that which causes fear and from which we must escape, of course, but also that which we can control, move, or, better yet, do away with. Fear, in a manner of speaking, defines the very shape of the threat and allows us to envision the capture of its object. We capture a terrorist, but terrorism cannot be captured, and terror, even less. How then are we to wage a war on terror? *The Objective* answers the question by representing the war in the manner of a perception of the threat. Terror even becomes sublimated by this perception. The desert is the product of a fantasy that, as a screen masking the true threat of the inexpressible, literally gives rise to the sublime.

Readers will recall that for Kant, the feeling of the sublime results from the impossibility for people to grasp through reason the meaning of that which we perceive, an impossibility that awakens the very human faculty of imagining that some things cannot be represented. Terror is sublime in that it stems from a mode of perception of that which cannot be named. This mode of perception produces terror as a means of integrating the inexpressible into the order of reality. According to Rancière, "terror is not simply a stronger fear in response to a more formidable and more diffuse threat. It is a way of feeling, naming, and explaining that which causes distress to each individual as well as in the

general order of the world."[5] Terror as a "means" can therefore be perceived as a "medium." The apparatus that produces terror, as well as its fantasmatic sublimation through a quest and through the figures that represent it, thus plays its full ideological role. It manages a trauma that it created itself. Terror becomes the sublime object of ideology, indeed of the medium—a media object insofar as it results from an apparatus that has found the means of explaining the "distress," though it cannot fight it. It may therefore be understood that a war on terror is inevitably doomed to fail. It produces an enemy for the subject that is no more than a manner of experiencing, naming, and recognizing a feeling of distress, the meaning of which the subject is unable to fully explain. Consequently, whereas the ideological apparatus mediatizes the distress, the technological apparatus re-mediatizes it. In this remediation lies the role played by the infrared camera in *The Objective*, making the device a character essential to the narrative. The device does not fill a void; it translates on an iconic level a manner of feeling distress. In this sense, the traumatic configuration of terror is and remains profoundly ideological.

What terrifies the group of reservists in *The Objective* is not the fact itself that they cannot see, but rather their consciousness of the fact. Needless to say, their terror is fundamentally ideological. It is this (false) consciousness that is remediatized by the device. This remediation introduces into the Imaginary and Symbolic order of reality an iconic figuration of the inexpressible that reinforces the feeling that we are faced with the abyss. A parallel can be traced between the figural representation of the threat in *The Objective* and the repeated broadcasting in the media of the images of the 9/11 attacks. The latter do not explain anything, rather they "remediate (and remedy)" a discursive and insufficiently concrete manner of feeling the threat. Therefore, mediation is always, in a double sense, *remediation*, as Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin[6] understand the term. Similarly, a media or ideological apparatus is primarily the "(false) consciousness" of a lack that must be *remedied*. What remains then, in this case, of the remediation, which is also an "inscription" of the threat? Of a threat that has become an enigma; the very enigma of terror, or the Real "force" that our Imaginary and Symbolic representations can never fully contain or grasp. And because an enigma does not exist unless it is transcribed, terror also relies on an inscription. Apparatuses are the only tools able to produce such inscriptions.

Thus, the mediations and remediations of the threat only serve to further emphasize the traumatic persistence of language's inexpressible residue. The resurgence of the unseen and the unknown is of an enigmatic nature, insofar as an enigma always suggests, according to Mario Perniola, "the coincidence of antagonists, the concatenation of opposites, the contact of things that are divergent, and even the antagonism of things that coincide, the opposition of the concatenated, and the divergence of things that are in contact with one another."[7] In other words, the traumatic persistence of the enigma is related to the possibility of chaos. And because this possibility does not arise of itself,

it needs an apparatus in order to remain apparent. Accordingly, an apparatus always plays a regulative/structural role. In *The Objective,* the technological apparatus manages and generates a spectral menace, in the same way the W. Bush administration's ideological apparatus managed and generated a threat of chaos that was just as spectral.

There remains, however, the noted absence of the mystical character. The recourse to mystical discourse in *The Objective* would have been interesting had it been achieved. Such a discourse would have introduced the unknown cause of chaos into the order of language. Though it would not have neutralized the trauma, mystical discourse would at least have offered the characters a form of guarantee on the level of the imaginary. However, this potential guarantee will never come. The mystic has disappeared, and gone with him is the redemptive and reassuring imaginary that he could have offered. We are left only with the technological apparatus that allows us to construe the threat as an enigma; an unsolvable enigma that the apparatus only serves to visually introduce into a traumatic configuration of terror. The trauma of the "unknown cause" is therefore repeated within this fantasmatic configuration, ceaselessly making reality seem strange and foreign. More specifically, it is indeed the representation of the threat that introduces into reality the trauma of the Freudian Thing, that is, the uncontrollable force that the psyche sets for itself as limit and residue of thought. The figuration of the threat is therefore characterized by a form of symbolic sublimation of the Real that, by means of a fantasmatic war on terror, becomes the symptom of our incapacity to come to terms with the void.

Conclusion

The incapacity to come to terms with the void is the traumatic crux of the film *The Objective,* its true plot. The interest of the film lies in the persistence with which it brings this incapacity onto the aesthetic level of the sublime. Indeed, if the technological apparatus only manages here to remediatize the lack, this is precisely because it produces a perception of terror that relates primarily to the subject's consciousness of his incapacity to see, to know, and, above all, to fight evil. The sublime of 9/11, which gave rise to the ensuing war on terror, proceeds from an ideological state apparatus. This apparatus turned the impossible experience of a war without an enemy into an incapacity for the subject to complete the mourning process. By the same token, the events of 9/11, thus remediated with the unexplained void they imply, appear in the end to have been caused solely by a deficiency of thought, an unspeakable barbarity, and, consequently, the limits of reason. Accordingly, we may suggest that the aptly-named Al-Qaeda conglomeration proves to be an opportunity for the sublime in modern society, one that results moreover from the idea advanced by the ideological apparatus that we must henceforth practice "infinite justice."

Notes

1. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 2009), 44.
2. Ibid., 45.
3. Ibid.
4. Jacques Rancière, "De la peur à la terreur," *Les aventures de la raison politique* (Paris: Éditions Métailié, 2006), 275–291.
5. Ibid., 275. Our translation. Original text: "La terreur, ce n'est pas simplement une peur plus forte répondant à une menace plus redoutable et plus diffuse. C'est une manière de ressentir, de nommer et d'expliquer ce qui cause du trouble dans l'esprit de chacun comme dans l'ordre global du monde."
6. J. D. Bolter and R. Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press).
7. M. Perniola, *Enigmas: The Egyptian Moment in Society and Art* (London: Verso, 1995), 18.

Part II

Popular Culture

The Priority of the Example: Speculative Identity in Film Studies

By Todd McGowan

Examples are always suspicious. They receive bad press from all sides. Those who want to follow a rigorous theoretical argument find the turn to the example spurious, a concession to the reader that one could almost always do without. The example enables readers to make sense of an argument that would otherwise bewilder them, but at the same time, it marks an interruption in the line of reasoning of the argument. An example may be convincing, but it is a theoretical sideshow. Those who focus on works of art rather than philosophical arguments have the opposite complaint about examples. The disdain that surrounds attempts to apply theoretical perspectives to works of art stems from the sense that a work of art does not simply exemplify certain concepts. No one likes "applied psychoanalysis" or "applied Marxism." To reduce the work of art to the status of an example is to violate its particularity, to use this particularity in the service of a theoretical position that has nothing intrinsically to do with the work of art itself. At best, the example is a necessary evil; at worst, it is the site of epistemic violence.

Attacks on Slavoj Žižek within the field of film studies often center on the role that the example plays in his approach to the cinema. When reading one of Žižek's books, one often has the sense that he just strings a series of examples together without a larger argument sustaining their coherence. One must read carefully to discern the argument that lurks within the examples. Examples seem to have primacy over arguments in his work, and he will return to a favorite example numerous times even when it doesn't seem to fit the argument he's making.[1] But ironically, this is not the attack that Žižek receives most often among scholars in film studies.

The one constant complaint that Žižek's film analyses receive concerns his use of films as examples of theoretical concepts. According to this line of thought, Žižek doesn't address films on their own merits but sees in them indifferent material that can demonstrate his Hegelian and Lacanian theoretical edifice. The film, in Žižek's hands, has no importance in itself. As David Bordwell notes in a famous critique of Žižek revealingly titled, "Slavoj Žižek: Say Anything," "His use of films is purely hermeneutic, with each film playing out allegories of theoretical doctrines."[2] This critique repeats one often directed against Žižek's key philosophical touchstone, Hegel, who also seems to have recourse to artistic works or historical events only insofar as they fit within his philosophical system.

 The sheer quantity of examples in Žižek's thought and the attitude he takes up to them seem to belie this critique. Rather than expressing disdain for the films that he analyzes, he appears to derive theoretical enjoyment from his interaction with the example. It is true, however, that films only appear in relation to theoretical concepts in Žižek's thought and never just for their own sake. This reveals not the correctness of the critique but the special role that the example plays in Žižek's thought. The example actually has the status of a concept in Žižek's work, just as it does in Hegel's. That is to say, we should think of the relation between example and concept as reversed: it is the example that provides the basis for the concept, and the concept that is founded on the example. The example has a conceptual priority over the concept.

The filmic example, for Žižek, is not just the proving ground of the concept, as it is for many thinkers. Instead, it represents the point at which the concept exceeds itself and reveals the contradiction that holds it together. Filmic examples play an irreplaceable role in Žižek's thought because, for him, concepts are inherently antagonistic. This is why the same example can illustrate different concepts at different moments in Žižek's intellectual trajectory. The example stays the same while the concept changes. For most thinkers, in contrast, the concept remains the same as the examples change. Antagonism predominates both concept and example, but only the latter renders it visible.

The difficulty for the thinker is articulating the antagonism of the concept. When one attempts to put this antagonism into propositional language, one misses it and instead conceals the antagonism under the cover of an assertion. The assertion of an antagonistic concept hides this antagonistic concept. But the example has the effect of showing what cannot be told and in this sense forms the foundation of the concept.

By granting philosophical priority to the example, Žižek follows the dictum of a philosopher with whom he is not often linked. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Ludwig Wittgenstein attempts to describe the logical structure of the facts of the world, a project that he would abandon entirely in his later philosophy. Though Wittgenstein believes at this point in his intellectual career that one can describe the world, he also recognizes a limit to this descriptive process. In the final proposition of the book (which is a series of propositions),

he warns, "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence."[3] That is, philosophy must not speak about what it cannot speak about, which suggests that something exists outside of all that one can describe.

But earlier, Wittgenstein makes a less well-known and yet more important statement about his effort to describe all that is the case in the world. He provides another formulation of a philosophical limit, but in this instance, he also offers a way of surmounting this limit. He says, "What *can* be shown, *cannot* be said."[4] Here, Wittgenstein articulates in his own fashion the priority of the example. The concept says, while the example shows, and in the showing, one can see the antagonistic structure of the concept that every statement obscures.[5] Though examples proliferate throughout Wittgenstein's work, he is not the first thinker to grant philosophical priority to the example.

Žižek's emphasis on the priority of the example has its roots in his philosophical parent figure—not Wittgenstein, but Hegel. Hegel grants the example a philosophical significance that no other thinker had historically bestowed on it. He didn't, of course, invent the example, but he privileges the example over the concept without abandoning the concept. By using an example, Hegel believes, one doesn't just concretize a concept but rather constitutes it. The example is the ground of the concept in Hegel's system. Based on his relationship to the example, Hegel marks a turning point in the history of philosophy.

Before Hegel, thinkers either avoided the example altogether or viewed it as a way to clarify concepts. Descartes has recourse to the piece of wax as an example to reveal the inadequacy of perception and our reliance on concepts to produce clear and distinct ideas. The example, ironically, demonstrates the inadequacy of examples in relation to concepts. In the wake of Descartes, other philosophers exhibit a similar suspicion of examples that relegates them to a secondary status. For instance, the nature of Kant's project in *The Critique of Pure Reason* almost demands that he eschew the example. As an exploration of the possibility of synthetic a priori judgments, Kant's philosophy cannot rely on a posteriori examples, and the result is that his examples are more or less limited to mathematical equations like $7 + 5 = 12$. Even the empiricists like Locke and Hume did not dilute their philosophical arguments for empiricism with many empirical examples because a reliance on examples would have, in their view, cast doubt on the argument itself.[6]

Whereas earlier philosophers doubt the role of the example in an argument, Hegel attacks argument itself and attempts in the process to redeem the example. Argument is not the linchpin of philosophical speculation but an abandonment of it because argument represents a failure to grasp the theoretical significance of what it attacks. In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel points out the one-sidedness of argumentation. When I construct an argument, I blind myself to how the form of my argument articulates the opposite of its content. In the act of arguing against an opponent, the fact that I am arguing at all indicates my tacit acceptance of the position that I am attempting to refute on the level of content. The more vehemently I attack, the more validity I grant to the position

that I attack without recognizing that I am doing so. As Hegel puts it, "Argumentation is reflection into the empty 'I,' the vanity of its own knowing.—This vanity, however, expresses not only the vanity of its own content, but also the futility of this insight itself; for this insight is the negative that fails to see the positive within itself."[7] An argument proclaims its own knowledge but cannot proclaim its reliance on what escapes that knowledge. This is where the superiority of the example to the argument lies. Like the example, the argument relies on what it opposes and cannot escape antagonism, but unlike the example, the argument cannot articulate its own antagonistic structure. One might say that an argument is just an example that doesn't realize that it is an example.

In contrast to the argument, the example illustrates its own failure. It has the capacity to successfully indicate what it fails to state directly. Through the example, we see that the concept says more than it seems to say. In the first section of *Phenomenology*, Hegel demonstrates the power of the example to exemplify not just the concept but also the antagonism that subtends the concept. The concept of sense certainty proclaims that our knowledge is confined to our immediate sensations. It is a philosophy that attempts to dispense with all mediation. But when Hegel provides an example of sense certainty, such as identifying a moment as "now" or a location as "here," it quickly becomes clear that sense certainty's apprehension of the immediate reality relies on the mediation of what it believes that it excludes. Or, to put it another way, sense certainty fails to be sense certainty, and the example reveals this failure. The "now" only exists in relation to other "nows," and the attempt to think it in isolation always fails. The same problem vexes "here" as well, which is never just a solitary "here" but a "here" opposed to other "heres" that allow us to locate it. These two examples reveal what the concept of sense certainty hides. Rather than signifying what it professes to apprehend, sense certainty secretly relies on the mediation that it consciously disavows. But this reliance becomes visible only through the example, which is why Hegel privileges it above the concept.

After Hegel, the situation turns around completely, as thinkers work to free the example from the tyranny of the concept. Kierkegaard champions the singularity that exceeds all conceptualization, and this singularity cannot be reduced to the status of an example. There are no examples for Kierkegaard because there are only examples. The inadequacy of the concept becomes evident in the case of an individual's death, which is an area where subsequent thinkers like Heidegger and Derrida would focus their critique of the concept. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (which is an extended critique of Hegel and Hegel's reliance on the concept), Kierkegaard claims, "for me, *my* dying is by no means something in general; for others, my dying is some such thing."[8] For Kierkegaard, the event of my own death cannot serve to exemplify dying as such because I confront it through my existence rather than through concepts. But death is only the most extreme manifestation of the singularity that defies the concept and that resists merely exemplifying the concept. This type of resistance exerts a constant force against conceptualization. Thought takes

refuge in the example, but when this occurs, the example ceases to be an example. Kierkegaard would belong to the camp of those who criticize Žižek for reducing films to the status of examples and thereby effacing their singularity as works of art.

In order to launch his attack on the role that the concept plays in Hegel's thought, Kierkegaard has to distort how Hegel conceptualizes the concept, especially in relation to the example. Hegel accepts that the example has primacy, but this entails a rethinking, rather than a critique, of the concept. The example doesn't provide an illustration of the concept or even evidence for it. Instead, it articulates the antagonism or internal difference at the heart of every concept. Through the example, the concept's non-identity with itself becomes evident. Though Hegel highlights the failure of the concept, he doesn't go as far as Kierkegaard and later thinkers go. He doesn't use the priority of the example to attack conceptualization as a form of violence that one must struggle against. As Hegel sees it, we need the concept in order to have the example that subverts the concept.

When we advance concepts in a propositional form, we create a sense of identity between subject and predicate. This sense of identity is the sine qua non of thinking. And yet, the propositional form of conceptual thinking functions as a constraint on how we view concepts. According to Gillian Rose, Hegel uses the propositional form because he must, but his aim is not the formation of ordinary propositions. Instead, Hegel formulates speculative propositions, propositions in which the identity of subject and predicate is also a non-identity. Thus, Hegel requires a different type of reader, one adept at reading in a speculative fashion propositions that appear ordinary. Rose claims,

> To read a proposition "speculatively" means that the identity which is affirmed between the subject and predicate is seen equally to affirm a lack of identity between subject and predicate. This reading implies an identity different from the merely formal one of the ordinary proposition. This different kind of identity cannot be pre-judged, that is, it cannot be justified in a transcendental sense, and it cannot be stated in a proposition of the kind to be eschewed. This different kind of identity must be understood as a result to be achieved.[9]

As Rose sees it, there is no way for Hegel to avoid the deceptiveness of the propositional form, which is why his interpreters must learn to read propositions in a new way.

Despite Rose's remarkable insight into the nature of Hegel's speculative propositions, she doesn't see the extent to which he anticipates and tries to correct this problem through prioritizing the example. Unlike the propositional form, the form of the example indicates both identity and non-identity. Through the example, we see how the concept is at odds with itself and how it always undermines itself through its very realization. The example is the vehicle for the manifestation of speculative identity, the identity of identity and non-identity, which is Hegel's great philosophical discovery.

The barrier to the statement of speculative identity is found in the nature of the signifier. One can never simply state the weaknesses or failures of one's own position. Any attempt to do so ends up becoming included in the position and thereby strengthens the position. Stating a weakness has the magical effect of transforming the weakness into a strength. This is because the point from which the subject speaks is always distinct from what the subject says. When I claim, for instance, that I do not have any knowledge, I deride the subject within the statement that I utter. But at the same time, I praise the subject speaking—the subject of the enunciation—who recognizes the lack of knowledge and thus must have some degree of knowledge. I can never catch up with the I who is speaking, which is why the subject cannot escape its unconscious.

The distance between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the statement intractably hinders our capacity for articulating speculative identity. Any proclamation of identity through non-identity will instantly become a proclamation of simple identity. The difficulty of Hegel's thought stems directly from his attempt to wrestle with this difficulty of language, to articulate contradictions without simultaneously resolving them. His ingenuous solution is to turn to the example, which shows the contradiction that one cannot tell. But even though he operates on the terrain of the example and the example directs the movement of his thought, Hegel remains a conceptual thinker. Hegel prioritizes the example in order to explicate the concept truthfully. That is, his thought moves through the example from concept to concept.

In his development of the priority of the example, Žižek has taken up Hegel's position and extended it to the point where his thought moves from example to example rather than from concept to concept. This leads some to conclude that Žižek doesn't construct sustained or coherent arguments, that he substitutes assertion for proof. This is the contention of Jeremy Gilbert, who attacks Žižek in severe terms for his failure to live up to the standards of academic scholarship that others accept. While Gilbert admits that Žižek has published some "good work," he highlights the moments when Žižek produces "a great deal of very bad work." He notes, "The bad work, which notoriously deals in generalizations, logical inconsistencies, groundless assertions and aimless polemics is not somehow saved or justified by Žižek's irreducible genius: it is an embarrassment, which the academy and leftist intellectual community ought to be ashamed of having tolerated for so long."[10] The viciousness of Gilbert's attack should not overshadow its tenor, which many of Žižek's detractors share, even if they express it with less hostility. Gilbert sees in Žižek's thought a lack of conceptual rigor, a refusal to make a coherent argument, and this refusal is indissociable from the priority that Žižek, following Hegel, grants to the example.

When one views the example as logically prior to the concept, "logical inconsistencies" abound. The example doesn't simply prove the concept in a logical fashion but always also exposes the antagonism that the concept harbors in an unavowed form. Of course, like any other thinker, Žižek makes

logical errors, but many apparent logical inconsistencies in his thought are the result of inconsistencies in logic itself that his turn to the example makes clear. The example reveals the unconscious of the argument, and in the unconscious, contradiction predominates.

The importance of the example in Žižek's contributions to film studies is clear in all of his analyses, but the fecundity of the example, its generative power, becomes especially apparent in his explanation of the gaze. The gaze is doubtless the central concept of psychoanalytic film theory, and it has had this status throughout the history of psychoanalytic film theory. A fatal misunderstanding of the gaze informs the inception of this theory in the 1970s (associated with the journal *Screen*), and then beginning around 1990 the correction of this misunderstanding and a formulation of a proper conceptualization of the gaze becomes the predominant theoretical task. Žižek himself played a crucial role in this reconceptualization of the gaze. He contended, along with Joan Copjec and others, that the gaze does not involve an identification with the mastering look of the camera, but rather it marks a stain in the visual field that disrupts the mastery of the spectator's look.[11] In order to correct the concept of the gaze as it had been deployed in film theory, Žižek turned to a series of examples.

One of the most revealing examples that Žižek employs comes from Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). Žižek does not locate the gaze where we might expect it—in the high camera looking down on the murder of Arbogast (Martin Balsam) at the top of the stairs or in Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) spying on Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) in her motel room. These are instances of the look, but not the gaze in the psychoanalytic sense. In order to explain Lacan's conception of the gaze, we might expect Žižek to turn to the famous shower scene. The fright that the spectator experiences in this scene stems directly from a traumatic encounter with what eludes the look. We see, from inside the shower, a vague shadow approaching, but we don't see enough, until the curtain opens and the violent slashing ensues. The rapid cuts in the scene don't allow us to notice that the murderer is not Norman's mother but Norman himself dressed up as his mother. Žižek could locate the gaze in any number of places in this scene. The gaze might be present in the shadow, the gesture of the curtain being pulled back, or the face of Marion witnessing her own imminent death. It marks the failure of mastery that the spectator experiences here, but he doesn't because this example, though it fits the concept of the gaze, fails to reveal how the concept of the gaze exceeds itself.

The key moment in *Psycho* occurs after the murder of Marion in the shower. The spectator can watch this scene and experience the disturbance of the gaze, but this disturbance doesn't make evident how the disruptive power of the gaze both belongs to and is at the same time distinct from the visual field. When we experience the gaze, our relation to the rest of the narrative in *Psycho* undergoes a revolution. The gaze, as Žižek conceives it, doesn't just reveal our vulnerability but also the trauma of the destructiveness of our own desire. Žižek

identifies the gaze in *Psycho* at the moment when Norman attempts to destroy the evidence of Marion's stay at the motel by submerging her car in the swamp behind the motel. When Norman does this, Hitchcock films the scene in a way that aligns the spectator with Norman's project: we want him to succeed in covering up the murder. But we can initially experience this desire without becoming aware of what it portends.

Hitchcock exposes our allegiance with Norman and our culpability on the level of desire with the murder when Norman directs the car into the swamp. This is one of the high points of Hitchcock's cinema because it not only makes the gaze manifest but it extends the very conception of the gaze, when Hitchcock creates the temporary impression that the car will not fully sink. Žižek writes,

> When the car stops sinking for a moment, the anxiety that automatically arises in the viewer—a token of his/her solidarity with Norman—suddenly reminds him or her that his/her desire is identical to Norman's: that his impartiality was always-already false. At this moment, his/her gaze is de-idealized, its purity blemished by a pathological stain, and what comes forth is the desire that maintains it: the viewer is compelled to assume that the scene he witnesses is staged for his eyes, that his/her gaze was included in it from the very beginning.[12]

The gaze always indicates a gap within the subject's look, a point at which the subject's look is included in what the subject sees. As a concept, the gaze remains separate from the visual field, the object that renders that visual field always incomplete and incapable of being mastered by vision.

But Žižek's example of the gaze from *Psycho* reveals that we must rethink the gaze and its relation to the visual field. Not only does this example implicitly criticize the misunderstanding of the gaze long promulgated by *Screen* theory—that the gaze is a look of mastery located in or identified with the camera—but it also signals a relation between the gaze and the visual field that exists alongside their separation. The gaze remains a disturbance within what the subject sees, but this disturbance reveals the status of the subject's desire in relation to the rest of the visual field. Here, the gaze is not an absence or a hidden presence (like the skull at the bottom of the painting *The Ambassadors*, where Lacan locates the gaze). Instead, the gaze is readily visible, and it functions as the gaze because it forces spectators to reexamine their own desires in relation to the visual field as it is constituted throughout the rest of the film.

A contrast between how Lacan conceptualizes the gaze in *Seminar XI* and Žižek's exemplification of it while discussing *Psycho* clearly evinces what the example makes possible. Lacan emphasizes that the gaze is difficult to see and that it doesn't fit within the field of vision. He says, "The gaze is presented to us only in the form of a strange contingency, symbolic of what we find on the horizon, as the thrust of our experience, namely, the lack that constitutes castration anxiety."[13] Lacan locates the gaze on the periphery of the subject's

experience, and the encounter with the gaze reminds the subject of its lack or castration. This conceptualization of the gaze is necessary for finding examples of it: the conceptualization has a chronological priority, but the example has a logical priority.

When Žižek turns to *Psycho* as an example of the gaze, we see that the gaze can expand beyond the horizon of our experience. It is not simply the mark of the subject's castration in the visual field, and the anxiety that the encounter with the gaze produces is not only castration anxiety. It is also the anxiety that stems from grasping the interdependence of one's desire and the entire visual field. Even though the gaze is just a point within the visual field or a moment within the narrative structure of a film, its impact is nonetheless felt through-out the visual field and throughout the narrative structure. This is what Lacan's conceptualization of the gaze cannot successfully indicate. The gaze is both absolutely separated from the visual field and fully integrated within it. There is no visual field that avoids the stain of the gaze.

In other words, this example of the gaze from *Psycho* demands that we rec-ognize that the gaze is always present as a distortion of the visual field, even when we have no awareness of it. The distinction between the visual field and the gaze persists—Žižek's entire conceptual edifice depends on it—but their interdependence now comes to the fore. The example enables Žižek to capture the speculative identity of the gaze and the visual field—their identity and their non-identity. One cannot assert this speculative identity in a propositional form, which is undoubtedly why so many film theorists mistook the gaze for the look of mastery. This is why even Lacan himself, who discovers the gaze, does not extend its implications as far as Žižek does.[14] Just as the dream pro-vides the royal road to the unconscious, the example offers the royal road to the concept, not just in the case of the gaze but with every concept.

After Žižek illustrates the gaze through the example of the car temporarily failing to sink in the swamp, he moves to another example from *Psycho* that also explains and at the same time exposes the antagonism within another of Lacan's concepts. Lacan differentiates between the *automaton* of the Symbolic order in which everything proceeds according to expectations and the *tuché* of the Real, the encounter that disrupts this Symbolic structure. As with the relationship between the gaze and the visual field, Lacan conceptualizes *automaton* and *tuché* as distinct, and this distinction is wholly necessary. In order for the Symbolic to be the Symbolic, it must be distinct from the Real. If the Real was simply identical with the Symbolic, there would be no need for separate concepts. But this conceptual thinking hides the identity of these concepts in their difference (or their speculative identity). The example, however, reveals both identity and non-identity coexisting.

Though spectators and interpreters of *Psycho* train their interpretative skills on the first murder in the film that takes place in the shower, Žižek claims that it is the second murder, the killing of the detective Arbogast, that marks the traumatic knot of the film. The murder in the shower comes as

a shock, but as spectators, we know that Arbogast will be killed when he leaves the motel and walks to the old house. And yet, Žižek asserts that the murder of Arbogast is even more terrifying than the first murder. This terror occurs not in spite of our knowledge that it will happen but because of this knowledge. Here, we witness the coincidence of automaton and tuché, the mechanical functioning of the Symbolic order and the Real that disrupts this functioning.

The trauma embodied in Arbogast's murder is inseparable from the speculative identity of automaton and tuché. When we know an event will occur through our knowledge of the symbolic mechanism producing it, this increases the trauma that we experience when the event actually does occur. As Žižek puts it, "The lesson of this murder scene is that we endure the most brutal shock when we witness the exact realization of what we were looking forward to—as if, at this point, *tuché* and *automaton* paradoxically coincide: the most terrifying irruption of *tuché* which wholly perturbs the Symbolic structure— the smooth running of *automaton*—takes place when a structural necessity simply realizes itself with blind automatism."[15] When Norman Bates (in the guise of his mother) kills Arbogast, the spectator doesn't entertain doubts about murder. One knows not only that it will occur, but also almost precisely when and where. As Arbogast approaches the bedroom, his death appears foreordained. But at just this point, Hitchcock's film provides one of the greatest shocks in the history of cinema. This bespeaks the power of the example to reveal the identity of difference, the identity of the Symbolic structure with the Real disruption of the Symbolic mechanism.

Lacan must distinguish the Symbolic from the Real, and yet, one must take a further step and show how these concepts enjoy a speculative identity. The disruptive Real lurks within the mechanism of the Symbolic structure because the working of this structure itself leads to a disruption, even—or especially—when everything goes according to plan. The disruption interrupts the mechanism, but the mechanism is also its own disruption. Symbolic success, in other words, is also failure. When the mechanism functions properly, the impropriety of its normal functioning becomes evident. But it is only through the antagonistic structure of the example that we can access this oxymoronic form of identity.

If Žižek moves beyond Lacan, it is because he produces endless examples of Lacan's concepts. The critiques are certainly correct that the examples don't exist on their own: Žižek never discusses a film just to discuss a film. But the critiques are also wrong to claim that he reduces filmic examples to the concepts that they elucidate. An example never simply elucidates a concept. It always antagonizes the concept that it exemplifies. This idea forms the basis of Hegel's philosophy, and with his adherence to the example, Žižek reveals his true colors. He may rely on Lacan's concepts, but he treats them in the manner of Hegel. His allegiance to Lacan is thus necessarily secondary to his allegiance to Hegel, just as the concept is logically secondary to the example.

The title of the collection in which Žižek's essay on Hitchcock appears is *Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid To Ask Hitchcock)*. This title alone suggests that the essays included will exemplify concepts from Lacan's thought and that Hitchcock will function simply as a vehicle for understanding Lacan. But the problem with this assumption is that vehicles never just take us where we want to go. They also—and more importantly—show us that we didn't necessarily want what we thought that we wanted. As much as Hitchcock illustrates Lacan's thought in this collection, his films also show its speculative identity in a way that Lacan himself could not. The example doesn't transcend the concept that it exemplifies, but it renders visible the antagonism of every concept, an antagonism that no direct statement of the concept can avow. The privilege of the example lies in its inseparable link to antagonism.

Despite the proliferation of examples in his thought, Žižek has not eliminated the contempt for the example that predominates among both philosophers and critics. Though this contempt takes on two opposed forms, its roots are always the same. Those who criticize the recourse to the example want their philosophical concepts or their works of art to be self-identical. The example is scandalous because it gives the lie to the idea of self-identity. It reveals that the concept cannot stand on its own without disguising its own antagonism and that the significance of the work of art depends on its relationship to concepts. Though Žižek's importance in the contemporary theoretical universe lies in bringing Hegel and Lacan together to form a new politicized notion of subjectivity, perhaps his lasting contribution will be the restoration of the example to a dignity that it never had.

Notes

1. One needs more than two hands to count the number of times that Žižek has recounted (in talks, in essays, and in books) an anecdote about Niels Bohr and a horseshoe. Žižek describes Bohr placing a horseshoe on the door of his house, and when questioned about this superstitious gesture, Bohr claims that of course, as a scientist, he doesn't believe in it, but he has heard that it brings good luck even for those who don't believe. This joke illustrates how belief functions: subjects don't believe directly but believe through the naïve Other supposed to believe. And yet, the example also reveals how a kernel of direct belief exists within all disbelief. The concept of belief through the Other involves the identity of belief and non-belief, and it is only the example that can present this paradox, which is why Žižek repeats it so often.
2. David Bordwell, "Slavoj Žižek: Say Anything," DavidBordwell.net: http://www .davidbordwell.net/essays/zizek.php.
3. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1961), 7.
4. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.1212.

5. The later Wittgenstein would abandon entirely the project of a logical description of the world, but he would retain the idea that one could show what occurs when one cannot describe it.

6. This is even the case in Hume's moral philosophy, an area where one expects examples. Hume writes the entirety of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Morality* with scant recourse to examples of any kind. He might have given instances of how utility leads to pleasure or how morality relies on convention, but he doesn't. Hume chooses to avoid examples despite being one of the most gifted writers among philosophers because he undoubtedly views them as extraneous to the argument.

7. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 36.

8. Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, vol. 1, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 167.

9. Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981), 48–49.

10. Jeremy Gilbert, "All the Right Questions, All the Wrong Answers," in eds. Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp, *The Truth of Žižek* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 61. As Žižek notes in his response to the essays in this collection, Gilbert feels free to insult Žižek in a way that he would not insult any other thinker. It is precisely Žižek's willingness to present his own contradictions through the example that leads to this unabashed contempt.

11. For a thorough account of the misreading and subsequent correction of the idea of the gaze, see Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007).

12. Slavoj Žižek, "In His Bold Gaze My Ruin Is Writ Large," in ed. Slavoj Žižek, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)* (New York: Verso, 1992), 233.

13. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978), 72–73.

14. Perhaps the problem is that Lacan is simply not as adroit as Žižek at the art of choosing examples. His example of the gaze—Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors*—reveals how the gaze (as the distorted skull at the bottom of the painting) exposes the vanity of the riches displayed in the visual field above. But this example does not show how our desire deforms this visual field, as the example from *Psycho* does.

15. Slavoj Žižek, "In His Bold Gaze My Ruin Is Writ Large," 230.

Imagining the End Times: Ideology, the Contemporary Disaster Movie, *Contagion*

By Matthew Beaumont

It has recently become something of a cliché, at least on the Left, to cite the claim, first made by Fredric Jameson in *Seeds of Time* (1994), that in the current conjuncture it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. "Someone once said," Jameson writes in "Future City" (2003), where he recapitulates and revises the point, and where it becomes apparent that he is probably misremembering some comments made by H. Bruce Franklin about J. G. Ballard, "that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism."[1]

Slavoj Žižek has frequently repeated this provocative claim, in articles, books and interviews. "Think about the strangeness of today's situation," he urges in *Zizek!* (2005), for instance, a documentary directed by Astra Taylor:

> Thirty, forty years ago, we were still debating about what the future will be: communist, fascist, capitalist, whatever. Today, nobody even debates these issues. We all silently accept global capitalism is here to stay. On the other hand, we are obsessed with cosmic catastrophes: the whole life on earth disintegrating, because of some virus, because of an asteroid hitting the earth, and so on. So the paradox is, that it's much easier to imagine the end of all life on earth than a much more modest radical change in capitalism.

This formulation, which might more accurately be characterized as ironic than paradoxical, is now regularly identified with Žižek as well as Jameson—in part no doubt because the former, to understate the matter, is a more flamboyant semioclast than the latter. In the opening pages of *Capitalist Realism* (2009), for example, Mark Fisher reports with due caution that, "watching *Children*

of Men [2006], we are inevitably reminded of the phrase attributed to Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism." "That slogan," he continues, "captures precisely what I mean by 'capitalist realism': the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it."[2]

The constituent failure of the political imagination diagnosed in these terms by both Jameson and Žižek might be designated as an almost pure instance of ideology—at least if we interpret this notoriously complicated and conflicted term, perhaps rather simplistically, as a narrative, universal or particular, that naturalizes the historical, making the politically mutable seem immutable. This was Roland Barthes's emphasis in *Mythologies* (1957). For him, bourgeois ideology was "the process through which the bourgeoisie transforms the reality of the world into an image of the world, History into Nature." This is "the very principle of myth," he emphasized: "It transforms history into nature."[3]

*   *   *

In the last decade or so, there have appeared a number of Hollywood disaster movies, generally shaped by a pious, politically cheap ecological message, that have displaced historical end times onto natural ones: History onto Nature. The demise of the American *imperium* has been collapsed into the end of the world—as if people might not notice the relative decline of the U.S. if they are sufficiently distracted, as in *The Day after Tomorrow* (2004), to take an example almost at random, by an apocalyptic flood that obliterates not just Wall Street but New York itself and every other metropolitan city on the face of the globe. This is the equivalent of that old trick of concealing a corpse by setting fire to the house in which the homicide has been committed. But it raises this logic, the logic of hiding things in plain sight, to a hitherto unprecedented level. The regime of the spectacle dictates that, at the same time exhibited and rendered invisible, it will appear, as Guy Debord phrased it, "out of reach and beyond dispute."[4]

In the case of the purloined mode of production, the injunction is to conceal the corrosion of the U.S. model of capitalism beneath the biblical destruction of absolutely everything. There's a chance that the masses might not notice the relative decline of U.S. capital if, on the IMAX screen that looms above them, everything from the family pet to humanity itself disappears along with it—for in the flood of debris it will, with any luck, be impossible to spot. Here is a dream of what might be described as primitive disaccumulation, the process whereby the world is brutally and rapidly stripped of its clutter prior to the imposition of some more streamlined version of capitalism. In *The Shock Doctrine* (2007), Naomi Klein calls this "disaster capitalism." Žižek has confirmed that Klein was correct "when, in her book *The Shock Doctrine*, she described the way global capitalism exploits catastrophes (wars, political crises, natural

disasters) to get rid of 'old' social constraints and impose its agenda on the 'clean slate' created by disaster." "Perhaps the forthcoming ecological crises," he adds, "far from undermining capitalism, will serve as its greatest boost."[5]

Returning to Jameson's and Žižek's nostrum about the end of capitalism and the end of the world, it needs to be added that both the financial shocks that have convulsed the West since 2008 and the revolutionary insurrections that have reconfigured the political geography of the Middle East more recently—or, the concatenation of these economic and political crises—have made it seem less plausible. In the images of an occupied Tahrir Square, for example, and even those of an occupied Wall Street, it became possible to imagine not just an end to the political and economic regimes against which those involved were protesting, but the origins of something else. Their basic message is, as Žižek has put it, that "the taboo has been broken, we do not live in the best possible world: we are allowed, obliged even, to think about the alternatives."[6] Tahrir Square, to take the more important example, seemed to represent one of those spaces of hope of which David Harvey has spoken, spaces that prompt us to believe that society can be "remade and reimagined";[7] and as such, in spite of its contradictions, it momentarily appeared to contain intimations of a postcapitalist future, a society shaped by participatory forms of democracy.

Cultural discourse, however, tends to lag behind political discourse. It is therefore not surprising that no genuinely popular product of mass culture has as yet risked attempting to bring the collective imagination up to date by staging the collapse of capitalism as such (though the 2011 movie *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* portrays an event that looks pleasingly close to a proletarian insurrection). Lots of disaster movies have been produced recently, as I intimated, but the agent of destruction tends to be a tsunami or a twister rather than corporate capitalism itself. According to the logic of sublimation, economic crisis is in this context still displaced into ecological crisis; that is, into the traditional aesthetic domain of the sublime. Animatronics experts rewire history to make it look like nature; CGI technicians transform the reality of the world into an image of the world (to repeat Barthes's formulation). In Hollywood, predictably, it is, in a precise sense, business as usual.

In mainstream cinema at present, it is not so much men and women who make history as superhuman or even supernatural agents—including gods. These gods do not do so in circumstances of their own choosing, since human beings, in their arrogant disregard for ecology, have messed about with these; but it is these gods that nonetheless make history. In general, they disguise themselves, just as the classical gods tended to do, as forces of nature: avalanches, earthquakes, fires, or floods. It is in familiar incarnations of this kind that they take revenge for humanity's thoughtless erosion of the earth's resources. But in some cases the gods disguise themselves as—gods. *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2010), a children's fantasy film that opens with a meeting between Poseidon and Zeus on top of the Empire State Building, is one instance of this. So are *Thor* (2011) and both *Clash of the Titans* (2010)

and *Wrath of the Titans* (2012). An example in a slightly different genre is *The Cabin in the Woods* (2012), an elaborately and tediously self-conscious horror movie. It transpires in this film that the all-American kids on which its narrative centers are being victimized and tortured—by a comprehensive range of mythological monsters—in order to appease primitive subterranean gods who demand an annual sacrifice of youthful human flesh. (The film's best joke is that, alone among these nubile teenagers, it is the stoner, a college dropout modeled on Shaggy in *Scooby-Doo*, who grasps the logic of this cosmic conspiracy, which he then heroically and selflessly resists.)

It is possible to argue that the role of the gods in contemporary cinema is allegorical of those hedge-fund entrepreneurs whose Olympian arrogance and greed continues to cause the destruction of so many ordinary people's lives in Europe and the United States (this image of an almost omnipotent but fatally capricious elite of financial demigods is the creepy impression of *Fool's Gold* [2009], Gillian Tett's fascinating account of the activities of the derivatives team at J. P. Morgan prior to the crash of 2008). The gods are agents of free-market capitalism at its most cruelly capricious and opaque. "Over the last few years," Žižek recently observed in a discussion of *The Wire*, "we do indeed seem to have witnessed the rise of a new prosopopoeia where the thing [that] speaks is the market itself, increasingly referred to as if it were a living entity that reacts, warns, makes its opinions clear, etcetera, up to and including demanding sacrifices in the manner of an ancient pagan god."[8] In this context, the double displacement that the films I have cited enact, from history onto nature and from nature onto mythology, is a reactionary one, insofar as it implies that, even in the advanced capitalist nations people are little more than flies to wanton gods—politically both helpless and hopeless.

*   *   *

In the space that remains I want to turn to a rather more interesting and contradictory cinematic response to the contemporary crisis of capitalism, though one that, in spite of its superficially scrupulous liberal credentials, is probably no less reactionary than *The Cabin in the Woods*. This is *Contagion* (2011), directed by Steven Soderbergh. *Contagion* is a film about a virus, not unlike SARS, that threatens to destroy humanity. It is an all-star disaster movie centered on a disease, then. But, like many of the current products of what might be called generic engineering, including *The Cabin in the Woods*, it nostalgically patches together other popular forms too, from horror to the conspiracy thriller (the critic of the *New York Times* noted that it "update[s] 1970s paranoia freakouts like *All the President's Men*").[9] It thus resuscitates several 1970s genres at once, reviving memories of the economic crisis in which, for obvious reasons, those movie genres thrived.

In "Future City," Jameson elaborates his initial claim that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism by speculating that the

present time is typified, more precisely and more progressively, by "the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world."[10] Presumably he means "the attempt to imagine *the end* of capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world"—though if this is a typographical or editorial error, it is suggestive enough, for it offers a reminder that, as Walter Benjamin insisted, under capitalism, "the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule."[11] The limits of the contemporary political imagination, Jameson appears to be suggesting, can be exploited for allegorical purposes and so made to perform a critical function. So a film about some unstoppable natural cataclysm that smashes a metropolitan city and its population to pieces might be interpreted as a coded attempt to contemplate the implosion of capitalism.

It is easy enough to contend that *Contagion*, made in the midst of the global financial crisis, and set in a constellation of global locations, like Soderbergh's *Traffic* (2000) and so many other contemporary films that might be characterized as totalizing-by-numbers, is exactly this sort of movie. After all, the central metaphor of the film, that of infection, is a deliberately labile one. It is intended to evoke the uncontrollable and highly dangerous reproductive capacities in a globalized society not simply of disease but of all kinds of communication, from rumor to more technological, more highly mediated forms like the Internet. Soderbergh's almost pathological loathing for bloggers, who are in this film the most minacious and mendacious of all agents of misinformation, is effortlessly if not entirely deliberately captured in Jude Law's characteristically dislikeable performance—the blogger as blagger. One of the film's most prominent victims is, implicitly, the newspaper industry: "Print media is dying! It's *dying*!"

In the single most powerful moment of the film—ironically, the couple of seconds before the action or dialogue begins—Soderbergh cunningly makes it clear that cinema itself is part of this economy of communication. When the screen goes black, after the distributors' logos have faded from the screen, a sudden, perfectly ordinary-sounding cough, which instantly makes us conscious of our neighbors in the cinema, signals our susceptibility to contamination. It is a neat dramatization of what Žižek has characterized as the "over-proximity" of the neighbor, the intrusion of their "inhumanity," which here takes the form of the parasite to which they might be acting as the host, into the space that the subject carefully demarcates and protects through distancing devices such as custom and habit.[12] But this cough also signals our suggestibility, our susceptibility to the media that transmit information and misinformation. At this point, if at no other, the film's form brilliantly enacts its content. Soderbergh's original intention to shoot the movie in 3D would have reinforced this incipient sense that the cinema itself is part of the film's sensorium, intruding the film's surfaces, with their traces of contamination, into the space inhabited by the audience. In fact, the cough with which the film starts is something like a residue of Soderbergh's 3D conception, the aural equivalent of a 3D effect that penetrates the cinema's fourth wall and forces the spectator onto the defensive.

As the narrative begins, it becomes clear that this cough belongs to Gwyneth Paltrow, who is seated in an airport bar. It later transpires that she represents what epidemiologists call the disease's "index patient," in other words, she is the first case to be scientifically identified in the relevant population. Paltrow dies a pretty horrible death a couple of scenes later, disappearing from the screen even more rapidly than Janet Leigh in *Psycho* (1960); and this death is capped, so to speak, by a particularly gruesome autopsy in which her scalp is carefully, graphically peeled from her skull. But if you feel disgusted, or even secretly gratified, by this undignified image of the famously wholesome actress, don't feel bad—she deserves it.

The reason Paltrow's character makes the perfect index case for a pandemic is, first, that she is a business executive of some kind who is in international transit; and, second, that she is taking advantage of a flight connection to pursue an extramarital affair. In a double sense, this is a dirty stopover. Paltrow's cosmopolitanism and promiscuousness—her thoughtless consumption of fossil fuels and selfish recourse to casual sex—prove to be a killer combination. A moralistic and faintly misogynistic undercurrent—in which, as in *Psycho* and so many of Hitchcock's other movies, an attractive blonde is violently punished for the role she has been forced to perform—is not the least disquieting of reasons for feeling suspicious about the film's apparently impeccable liberalism.

Stepping back from the autopsy table, though, and adopting a broader perspective, one might even argue that, in allegorical terms, this is in fact a movie directly about ideology, in both general and specific senses of the term. Generally speaking, as I have hinted, it can be construed as a critique of the apparently spontaneous diffusion of misinformation throughout society and of its deleterious consequences. On this interpretation, the film's politics are premised on the assumption that (as Henry James once put it) relations stop nowhere; and that, in a world in which almost every individual is intimately connected to others by elaborate chains of communication, no one can escape the contaminating effects either of bodies or discourses that have been corrupted. *Contagion* appears to subscribe, then, to an "epidemiological" theory of ideology, according to which people are simply the carriers and transmitters of ideology. The politics of this conception of ideology are implicitly undemocratic, because it assumes that the mass of people are merely passive agents of ideologically polluted ideas and by extension that it is the responsibility of an enlightened elite of one kind or another to cleanse society. "Nothing Spreads like Fear" is *Contagion*'s strapline.

More specifically, Soderbergh's film sometimes looks uncomfortably like an allegorical attack on the sort of ideologies—in the old-fashioned sense, meaning more or less systematic-looking sets of ideas—that threaten U.S. hegemony. This evokes use of the phrase "ideological contagion" by U.S. policy makers during the second half of the last century in order to demonize Islamist and socialist politics, disseminated from the Middle East and Latin America respectively. In those contexts, it served as a chilling pseudoclinical euphemism for

the spread of subversion. In a review of *Contagion* for the *New Yorker*, film critic David Denby conjured up memories of this older, post–Cold War rhetoric by classifying it, revealingly, as "a 9/11 anniversary movie." If one forgets the film's villains for a moment, who are in any case relatively hard to identify aside from Jude Law, and if one focuses instead on its heroes, this is a pretty plausible ascription. The good guys, as Denby observes, "are all employees of the federal government"—mainly state scientists or technocrats and Homeland Security officials.[13] So it is no surprise to learn that Soderbergh received extensive cooperation from the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention when making the movie.

There is one coded reference in the film to 9/11. Lawrence Fishburne, who plays the fictional head of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, announces at one point that the department's most pressing task, after the appearance of the virus, "is to find ground zero." It emerges that this ground zero, the point at which the disease first launched its attack, is Hong Kong. More precisely, it is the Hong Kong casino in which the feckless executive Paltrow frittered away her final evening in China—not simply gambling but ill-advisedly shaking hands with an unhygienic chef who had just filleted a pig that, so it eventually transpires, had been bitten by an infected bat. The chef represents the contagion's "antigenic shift," the moment at which the species barrier is leapt.

The cockpit of the disease in *Contagion* is, thus, a Chinese market, chaotic and dangerously unregulated. In this respect, Soderbergh draws on the circumstances of the outbreak of SARS in 2003, when a horseshoe bat passed the infection on to a civet cat, which was then sold for the purpose of human consumption in a market in Guangdong province in southern China. Subsequently, the disease was disseminated by passengers on a flight from Hong Kong to Beijing and thence across the globe—they were infected, as David Quammen has recently explained, by "a feverish man with a worsening cough."[14] Like Paltrow's character. This process, whereby national and international air travel rapidly accelerates the dissemination of the disease, is sometimes called "jet-spread."[15] Paltrow's picturesque puking is thus a symptom both of the rampant and corrupt form of capitalism with which China threatens to contaminate and out-compete the United States and of "globalization" as such.

In an additional sense, to return to Jameson's and Žižek's terms once again, it is inviting to read *Contagion* as an attempt to imagine the end of capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world. The social disorder that Soderbergh stages when the virus is raging across the United States, which is exacerbated by the fact that Law's character (the narcissistic internet journalist) has disseminated false information about the medical efficacy of a useless homeopathic substance derived from forsythia, closely resembles the effects of an economic crisis—in part because all this chaos has of course created one. Some time shortly before the entire U.S. population learns of the infection, one character predicts that "when word gets out, there will be a run

on the banks, gas stations, grocery stores, you name it." And so it comes to pass. Some of the film's most memorable scenes portray this social collapse, in images of rubbish and corpses piling up on the streets, looters trashing shops, and soldiers ineffectually operating curfews. These scenes offer the audience the vicarious thrills of what Žižek, in his discussion of the U.K. riots of 2011, has characterized as "a consumerist carnival of destruction."[16] Lenin famously called revolution a carnival of the oppressed: this is something like the shopping spree of the oppressed.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

At the core of Soderbergh's increasingly apocalyptic cityscapes—to pursue this reading of the film as a coded meditation on capitalist crisis—is the commodity. Or, if not the commodity, the object. As the etymological origins of the word *contagion* suggest, this is a film all about touch. For it is through touch that the virus is passed on—as Kate Winslet's luckless character, a medical consultant, makes clear when she points out in panicky tones that people touch their faces on average between two and three thousand times a day. More particularly, it is through handling and exchanging objects in their everyday lives that people spread the disease. In other words, it is the traffic of commodities and people in an international system of capitalist exchange that ensures the infection is rapidly diffused across the globe. The commodification of social relations underlies this logic and is one of its principal agents.

In *Contagion*, all objects are transmuted into fomites; that is, substances that carry infectious organisms on their surfaces. In the film's opening scene, for example, where Paltrow telephones her lover from the airport bar (one of those familiar nonspaces that incubate exotic diseases along with an infectious sense of anomie), Soderbergh's camera lingers unhealthily on the objects she touches, especially the peanuts in the bowl in front of her. Every object in the picture seems to be infected—as indeed does the entire object world, inside and outside the screen, including the armrests in the cinema, the carton of popcorn in one's hand, and so on. As I have already suggested, this is one of the senses in which, in some virtual rather than actual sense, if the distinction can be maintained in this context, the film is indeed 3D.

The movie therefore creates its most unsettling effects by revealing, according to the uncanny logic of the commodity, that apparently ordinary, self-identical objects are in reality inhabited by a hostile, alien force. Soderbergh's camera defamiliarizes these familiar objects, implicitly identifying them as commodities, the ciphers of alienated social relations rather than as things in themselves. The film exhibits the fact that all these objects are defined by their exchange value as distinct from their use value. They are the economic equivalent of fomites. Above all, in this first scene, Paltrow's credit card, which she hands to the bartender in order to pay for her drink, plays a significant role, according to this interpretation of the film at least, because it

fleetingly renders the outlines of *Contagion*'s economic allegory visible. Here the virus implicitly features as something like the obscene trace of the Real of capital.

But, like the other less sophisticated disaster movies I have mentioned, *Contagion* also comprises a failure of the political imagination. This failure can be grasped, adopting the method of ideological critique pioneered by Pierre Macherey, by attending to the film's "not-said." "What is important in the work," according to him, "is what it does not say."[17] The constitutive silence of *Contagion*, which according to an Althusserian irony articulates the film's ideological assumptions, is money. *Contagion* does not contain a single image of cash being exchanged. There is no money shot. In spite of the promising presence of Paltrow's credit card in the opening scene, then, Soderbergh refuses to represent the object or agent that, above all others, shapes social relations in capitalist society. It is a revealing oversight, given that coins and bank notes, which in epidemiological terms must be the most ubiquitous fomites about, circulate more rapidly and more widely than any other commodities. The film thus suppresses the supreme emblem of those alienated material relations in which social life is imbricated under capitalism. Money is the crucial "concrete universality," but it is missing from the film.

The metaphor of infection therefore turns out to be a curiously limited one for exploring the connectedness and (to employ a clumsy term) replicativeness of the contemporary social formation. Its advantage is that, like the political conspiracy that according to Soderbergh's film is an analogous species of contagion, it provides what Jameson once called "a formal pretext to touch all the bases in the urban landscape."[18] Indeed, it enables Soderbergh to touch all the bases in the global landscape. But its crucial disadvantage is that it uses this device both to occlude the commodity relations it evokes and to present a comprehensively flattened and indiscriminate picture of the relevant social geography. Deploying disease as the film's dominant trope enables Soderbergh to suggest that everyone is equally susceptible to contagion, conspiratorial fear, and socio-economic chaos. This is misleading, to put it mildly. It falsifies the social effects of disease itself, which for reasons too obvious to explicate are more likely to affect the poor than the rich; and, symptomatically, it makes no effort to understand the central mechanisms of either exchange or exploitation in class society. In sum, it exemplifies Barthes's definition of ideology as the operation "through which the bourgeoisie transforms the reality of the world into an image of the world, History into Nature."

It is tempting to interpret *Contagion* as an attempt "to imagine the end of capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world," in Jameson's original formulation. In spite of its allegorical potential, though—specifically its use of disease as a trope for thinking about ideology and globalization—*Contagion* finally admits that it is, after all, easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. Žižek is fond of paraphrasing a line from *Duck Soup* (1933), one of his favorite movies, in which Groucho Marx says, "Gentlemen,

Chicolini here may look like an idiot, and sound like an idiot, but don't let that fool you: he really is an idiot."[19] *Contagion* might look and sound like a natural disaster movie; but don't let that fool you: it really is a natural disaster movie.

Notes

1. See Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), xii; and "Future City," *New Left Review* 21 (May/June 2003), 76. The original association of the end of capitalism and the end of the world, where the claim made is rather different, is to be found in H. Bruce Franklin, "What Are We to Make of J. G. Ballard's Apocalypse?" There, Franklin accuses Ballard of "mistaking the end of capitalism for the end of the world"; and asks in conclusion, "What could Ballard create if he were able to envision the end of capitalism as not the end, but the beginning, of a human world?" http://www .jgballard.ca/criticism/ballard_apocalypse_1979.html

2. Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009), 1. Note that so often is Žižek cited in connection with this dictum that some ill-informed commentators even ascribe it to him: "One of Žižek's best known sound-bytes [sic] of a few years ago," writes Duncan Simpson in an online review of *Living in the End Times* (2010), "was that today it was easier to imagine the end of the world rather than an end to capitalism." http://www.counterfire.org/index.php/articles/ book-reviews/5720-slavoj-zizek-living-in-the-end-times

3. Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 1993), 141, 129.

4. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicolson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1995), 15.

5. Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010), 329. If this dream is ideological, in the old-fashioned sense of promoting the class interests of the bourgeoisie, then in some recent science-fiction films and novels it also encodes a utopian impulse. In a review of Margaret Atwood's *After the Flood* (2009), Jameson notes that the lethal, man-made plague invoked by the book's title, like the Biblical Flood, "fulfills its purpose, namely to cleanse the world of the toxic garbage of human society, leaving the few survivors (mostly people trapped in inaccessible and thereby uncontaminated spaces) to start something new." See "Then You Are Them," *London Review of Books* 31: 17 (10 September 2009), 7–8.

6. Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* (London: Verso, 2012), 77.

7. David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 159.

8. Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, 94.

9. Manohla Dargis, "A Nightmare Pox on Your Civilized World," *New York Times*, September 8, 2011. http://movies.nytimes.com/2011/09/09/movies/contagion-steven-soderberghs-plague-paranoia-review.html

10. Jameson, "Future City," 76.

11. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992), 248.

12. Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, 123.

13. David Denby, "Call the Doctor," *New Yorker* September 19, 2011. http://www
    .newyorker.com/arts/critics/cinema/2011/09/19/110919crci_cinema_denby

14. David Quammen, *Spillover: Animal Infection and the Next Human Pandemic* (New
    York: Norton, 2012), 168.

15. See Mike Davis, *The Monster at Our Door: The Global Threat of Avian Flu* (New
    York: The New Press, 2005), 42. Davis offers a characteristically sharp and infor-
    mative polemical account of the politics and economics, as well as the science, of
    contemporary pandemics.

16. Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*, 60.

17. Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London:
    Routledge, 1978), 87.

18. Fredric Jameson, "Conspiracy as Totality," *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and
    Space in the World System* (London: BFI, 1995), 32.

19. See, for instance, Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan
    through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 73.

Žižek and the 80s Movie Song: "There *Is* a Non-Relationship"

By Graham Wolfe

One of the most enjoyable aspects of revisiting movie songs from the 1980s—now more accessible than ever online—is the inadvertent comedy of their incongruities. The video for Peter Cetera's "Glory of Love" (1986), a #1 hit from *The Karate Kid II*, places the unathletic 42-year-old singer in a karate dojo. Many of the thousands of comments on YouTube express how enjoyable it can be to laugh at Cetera, swaying dreamily in his oversized mock-turtleneck sweater, offering to be "the hero that you're dreaming of."

Further comedy awaits a *Karate Kid* fan in the asymmetries between Cetera's song and the world of the movie. Suffice it to mention the first line of the chorus: "I am the man who will fight for your honor." Only someone who had ignored the lessons of Mr. Miyagi (Pat Morita) would make such a claim. The film debunks honor as an outdated code, which Miyagi himself had repudiated by leaving Okinawa decades previously. When Miyagi's teenage student Daniel LaRusso (Ralph Macchio) does fight, it is not to preserve the honor of his Okinawan girlfriend, Kumiko (Tamlyn Tomita), but to save her life. Daniel's enemy, Chozen (Yuji Okumoto), is the only one who fights for honor—his own—and the film presents this as the misguided choice of a flawed man.

The reluctance of critical theory, until recently, to engage seriously with 80s movie songs can be partly attributed to their perceived asymmetry and out-of-jointness with the films they provide soundtracks for: "In the worst cases, the songs are inserted cynically and clumsily, booming over montage sequences and credits as if they are Pavlovian advertisements for synergy."[1] The videos for these songs, coinciding with the early days of MTV, often amount to slideshows of clips conspicuously disconnected from music and lyrics. But perhaps it is here—apropos of out-of-jointness *per se*—that we can locate a key role for Slavoj Žižek's psychoanalytic philosophy amidst the recent spate of work on "popular music

and multimedia." To put a spin on Julie McQuinn's terms, a Žižekian lens can supplement the "productive potential of interactivity" by exposing the productive potential of asymmetry.[2] My thesis, however, is not only that this "anamorphic" lens can reveal seemingly simple movie songs as reflecting the complex operations of human desire and fantasy. Such an argument remains vulnerable to charges that Žižek pillages media for examples of his concepts. What should be accomplished here is a speculative inversion: it is only via such asymmetries that we can account for the strange success and persistent attraction of these movie songs.

He's Gotta Be Larger than Life

Contra Lacan's infamous assertion that "there is no sexual relationship," 80s movie songs frequently present themselves as the blissful accompaniment to fulfilled love. But the dynamics of this fundamental Lacanian asymmetry—which serves as a paradoxical center of much of Žižek's work—can be explored by juxtaposing Cetera's movie song with one that initially seems its feminine counterpart: Bonnie Tyler's "Holding Out for a Hero," a hit from *Footloose* (1984). While Cetera envisions being "a knight in shining armor," Tyler begs for a "knight upon a fiery steed." Her chorus ("I need a hero") is a desperate plea for what Cetera offers ("the hero you've been dreaming of "). Isn't this symmetry—or close enough?

Cetera's "glassy vocals" float above an initially dreamy, meandering piano-ballad that draws on synthesized brass and stately guitar rhythms to lend grandeur and an honorable touch of testosterone to the wedding dances it continues to be requested for.[3] Tyler's famously raspy alto, whether riding bareback on percussive piano chords or spurred on by thunderous toms, glissandos, and a choir of sirens, is as ravenous and visceral as Cetera's tenor is dreamily cool. But this is no case of yin and yang: the movie songs are undergirded by incompatible fantasy dynamics. Tyler is simply not looking for someone who will fight for her honor. In the video, set in the Wild West, she is threatened by men intent to kill rather than ravish her or otherwise impugn her reputation (indeed, what she seems most to object to is their dragging her *out* of the bedroom). Moreover, her insistence on "holding out" for a hero ("till the end of the night") should be taken in all its western-outlaw connotations. She will spend the night refusing to give herself up, *desiring* rather than (partially, temporarily) satiating herself with an empirical man who could not possibly be equivalent to her fantasy. The song calls for a full phallic presence exceeding any finite male—"he's gotta be larger than life"—which is why the video, cognizant of the dynamics of what Lacan calls the *objet a*, figures the hero indexically as a silhouette, a flash, a hand on a gun, images lasting no longer than the blistering, single-beat snare fills they accompany. After all, the singer's "wildest fantasy" is not an obtainable entity but "something just beyond [her] reach." In Žižek's Lacanian terms, it is by holding out for this (impossible) entity that she *realizes*

her desire: "the realization of desire does not consist in its being 'fulfilled,' 'fully satisfied,' it coincides rather with the reproduction of desire as such."[4] In this light, the real Master she kneels before in the video's final image is the law of desire, for which *this* is never *that*.

But Tyler's most vital lesson on desire can be found in a short circuit between form and content. If the song expresses the singer's yearnings, its music is frequently the accompaniment to the *hero's* travels and adventures. This is especially clear in the lengthy bridge after the second chorus: the imminence of his arrival is literally trumpeted; drum fills evoke the pounding of horse hooves as he rides across mountainous terrain, chasing villains. The Žižekian gesture consists in recognizing the truth of this apparent asymmetry. The music does not simply "accompany" the heroic male but creates the sublimity of the place he would occupy—the attractiveness of this fantasy-figure, his larger-than-life status, is directly correlative to the way he is framed by the music itself. It is through this short circuit between content and form that "Holding Out for a Hero" most vividly reflects Lacanian desire, which not only yearns for an unattainable object but is simultaneously the cause of that object's sublimity.

The placement of this song in *Footloose* introduces additional asymmetries. In an obvious allusion to *Rebel Without a Cause*, Ren (Kevin Bacon), a new teen in a small Midwest town, is challenged to a type of chicken race by local bully Chuck (Jim Youngs): they must drive tractors toward each other along a path, the chicken being the one who pulls into the ditch. The music is diegetic—Chuck presses play on his tape player as the game commences. Chuck's selection is of course ironic, given his absolute indifference to fulfilling the feminine desire that plays over this masculine bravado (accentuated through a phallic raising of tractor spades: "You wanna go up?"). In Lacan's terms, if the apparent "goal" of such male activity is to obtain sex by impressing women, its "aim" is masturbatory indulgence in masculine *jouissance*, enjoying itself in the manner of what Lacan calls "drive" (and driving Chuck's girlfriend away). But in this precise sense, the song unites Chuck and Tyler as the perfect(ly asymmetrical) couple. The realization of her desire provides the soundtrack to his drive.

What links Cetera's movie song with Tyler's, far from sexual complementarity, is rather asymmetry *per se*. The song's out-of-jointness with *The Karate Kid II* pertains most notably to sexual disjunctions, which arise from the opening line: "Tonight it's very clear, as we're both lying here." Not only are Daniel and Kumiko never seen lying together; sex seems an ontological impossibility in this film—even their brief kiss is interrupted by a storm that arises to forestall the sexual relationship. Similarly, the singer's profession of love ("I will always love you") is much too direct for Daniel, who can only hint at his feelings. The phrase, sung quietly and tilting the song from major scale to minor, comes across as a late-night repetition of something that's been said a thousand times. In short, the song is about people Cetera's own age in weathered relationships, not teenagers in their first days of a fiery crush. Indeed, in conspicuous

opposition to the film, Cetera's world is defined by *boring* problems. "Sometimes I just forget, say things I might regret"—tonight was just another time when he said something stupid that made his partner cry. If he's at risk of losing her ("I don't want to lose you"), this is not because a bloodthirsty Okinawan has a knife to her throat—the relationship is threatened by nothing more than its internal irritants.

What the video dramatizes in this sense is a 42-year-old man's attempt to vivify a relationship by transposing its internal obstacles into external threats; and in this sense, while the film can be critiqued for fetishizing "Oriental" culture and femininity, the video sheds further light on the dynamics of fetishism *per se*. Fetishism, Žižek explains, makes into the *object* of desire what is "officially the *obstacle* to the direct goal-object."[5] The conclusion of the third chorus features Daniel and Kumiko's hands romantically clasped across a table, but on the chorus's last note (coinciding ironically with "love"), a bottle is slammed onto the table and Chozen's pelvic region is thrust into the frame. Following this beat, which initiates a second bridge, the camera lifts in tempo with the majestic, triumphant timbres of the synthesizers, taking in the whole of Chozen's figure, both sexualizing and "glorifying" that which forestalls the sexual relationship. It is as though, having already yielded Cetera's highest note (on "castle"), and having, after the inevitable guitar solo, indulged in the inevitable key change, the movie song itself needs this fetishistic supplement to keep the love and glory going for another eight bars.

But Žižekian theory can locate a more subtle fetishism here. Cetera does not directly supplement his mundane relationship with the fantasy of heroic romance; the supplemental fantasy is rather that of teenagers for whom such fantasies are still alive. Put differently, what the video offers is not (simply) "I'll be your knight" but "I'll be your Daniel LaRusso"—I'll be the teenage boy who dreams of being a knight for your teenage girl, I'll be that which *would have* fulfilled your teenage desire. After all, the challenge confronting the relationship is probably not that the singer is inadequate vis-à-vis his partner's intensely romantic dreams, but that 42-year-olds do not tend to dream intensely romantic dreams. "I'll be the hero you've been dreaming of" implies a preliminary invitation: *let's dream that you've been dreaming of a hero*. Daniel and Kumiko are thus cast as "subjects supposed to believe"; the fantasy requires the presence of this gaze for whom heroism and eternal union in a faraway castle is still a sublime prospect (not a tiresome cliché or embarrassing excess). To appropriate Žižek's terms, "The real object of [Cetera's] fascination is not the displayed scene but the gaze of [the teens], the naïve 'other' absorbed, enchanted by it."[6]

Žižek creatively re-envisions media such as beer commercials to demonstrate the inconsistent fantasies that support the sexual (non-)relationship. We could follow suit with a reworking of the final shot of "Holding Out for a Hero." When Tyler, prostrate in the dirt and burning with desire, raises her head to look upon the man who has finally come, what she beholds is a head-banded Peter Cetera, clad in a black-belted dogi and preparing to perform a crane kick.

The conspicuous out-of-jointness of this figure accentuates not only the finite male's inevitable failure to embody Tyler's fantasy. Also extraneated is the precariousness of the male figure's own desire, dependent as it is upon a certain minimal distance from the fantasy world. A Žižekian perspective thus calls for a twist on the oft-noted ambiguity of singers' diegetic status in videos: "The performer-figures in most music videos occupy positions between those of the fully-diegetized character in narrative or poetic scenarios and that of the extra-diegetic musician/singer who stands apart from these scenarios."[7] Does not a similar in-betweenness pertain to "real-world" subject-fantasy relationships?

But while Lacanian theory is intent to expose these kinds of asymmetries, the properly Žižekian gesture does not consist in reducing Cetera's song to fantasy and fetish. To return to the terms with which this discussion began, if there is something comical about the incompatibility between Cetera's world and Daniel's, Žižek reminds us that the love relationship is itself defined by comic incongruity. There is always something funny about the inevitable mismatch—the "radical split or gap"—between the finite, limited person we love and the position they assume for us: "You—this empirical person, full of defects—are *you*, the sublime object of love."[8] Love takes surprise and enjoyment in this very gap: "how can you be *you*?" Or in Cetera's case, "Glory of Love" is a *love* song not insofar as it fantasizes about romantic adventures and glorious possibilities beyond the implied couple's reality, but insofar as it effects a (comical) short circuit between these apparently asymmetrical domains: "Isn't it funny that this mundane relationship of ours, with its tedious arguments and irritants, *is* somehow glorious? Isn't it funny that our diegetically unsuitable story, so lacking in climactic victories, *does* seem to require a soundtrack like this?" Here again, truth emerges through an asymmetry between form and content: the intensifying cinematic synthesizer that progressively supplements the piano in the second verse and beyond seems altogether asymmetrical with Cetera's references to a commonplace relationship with daily problems. But what is the "fragile absolute"—"the fragile coincidence of an ordinary object with the absolute Thing"—if not such an asymmetry between diegetic content and soundtrack?[9]

I Can Hear the Music Playing

Roxette's "It Must Have Been Love," a #1 single from the *Pretty Woman* soundtrack, provides a memorable demonstration of Žižek's description of the *objet a* as paradoxically emerging "at the very moment of its loss."[10] The singer's pain derives not just from the recognition that love is "over now"; what makes the loss so painful is that the love wasn't fully perceived *until* it was lost. The video's retracing of moments from *Pretty Woman* reflects a lover's own process of revisiting previous scenes and viewing them through a different lens, with the painful recognition that *that* was love. Appropriately, the moments selected from the film are not generally the most passionate or intense—we get a series

of relatively mundane events (the couple plays chess, she helps him with his cuff links). The video thus stages the retroactivity of the *objet a*—it appears in the realization that those seemingly mundane moments were in fact "it," the "thing itself."

This retroactivity acquires additional dimensions given the timing of the song. Based on a previous Roxette number from 1987 but reconfigured for release with *Pretty Woman* in February of 1990, the song serves as an exemplary commentary on the near-instantaneousness of 80s nostalgia (surfacing, for instance, in the immediate proliferation of "retro-80s nights" and "80s mixes"). We may have had a great time in the 80s, but only in February of 1990 did we realize it must have been love.

But to get to the deeper truth of this video we should consider it from the inverse angle. To pair Roxette's song (played near the film's end) with early moments of the relationship is to illuminate the paradoxical sense in which that song was *already playing* during those early moments. In other words, the very intensity of the relationship between this businessman and this prostitute was a product of their perception of it, from the start, as already lost. To appropriate Alenka Zupančič's comments on a different film, "We could say that even during the time their relationship 'is happening,' it is already a memory; the couple are living it as already lost."[11] This effect is enhanced by the video's incorporation of a scene midway through *Pretty Woman* in which Richard Gere is playing the piano, such that he seems, in Roxette's video, to be playing *this* song. A similar device is used in Starship's "Nothing's Gonna Stop Us Now," a #1 hit from *Mannequin* (1987). The video incorporates clips of Andrew McCarthy dancing with Kim Cattrall, such that they seem to be dancing in time to Starship's music, or playing guitar such that McCarthy himself seems to be playing Starship's guitar solo. The impression is that the characters *have been* dancing and rocking to a song that does not in fact play until the film's end.

Can these dynamics shed light on the libidinal operations of movie songs *per se*? On one hand, a movie song affirms its success when viewers recall the film through its lens, such that each of the film's features is colored by what was previously only one of its elements. Simultaneously, a movie song, when most successful, seems somehow to have been playing the whole time. To say that a song *makes* a movie is to imply not just that it provides a suitable musical complement, but that only through this surplus feature does the heart of the movie actualize itself. Keeping in mind the highly asymmetrical relationship of many 80s songs with the movies they "make," it is tempting to paraphrase what Žižek calls the "Hegelian performative": of course a movie song is only a movie song insofar as it was framed that way (indeed, "in itself" it is often quite random, its relation to the film utterly contingent); the point, however, is that the very unity of the film, that which the song "embodies," actualizes itself only in the moment of a song.[12] The very film, which the song comes to represent, would not have attained its unity and force if not for this contingent element that "stands in" for the whole of it.

We can explore additional dimensions of this paradox by turning to one of the most conspicuously asymmetrical movie songs in the art form's history, John Parr's "St. Elmo's Fire (Man in Motion)." This #1 hit has baffled close listeners, but even the title reflects a primary disjunction in purpose. Used in 1985's *St. Elmo's Fire*, it was also the theme for wheelchair athlete Rick Hansen's "Man in Motion" tour, an inspiring global journey to raise money for spinal research. While parts of the song address the predicament of the film's characters—it's about "growing up," feeling the pain, and discovering that "everything has changed"—other parts seem to describe Hansen's courageous mission: "I can make it, I know I can," "All I need is a pair of wheels." Indeed, the song's co-writer David Foster has confessed to the (comic) asymmetry of its conception: "Funny thing is, to this day I don't think that the director of the movie knows that it was *Rick's* efforts, not the movie in fact, that fueled the true inspiration of this song."[13]

What is St. Elmo's fire? Judging by the song alone—a "pounding rocker" that "relentlessly generates sentiment and surging feelings of pride, determination, and exhilaration"[14]—we would take it for a passion by virtue of which people like Hansen can "climb the highest mountain, cross the widest sea." As Parr himself proclaims, the song has the feel of both *Chariots of Fire* and *Rocky*: "I can see Rocky climbing the steps with that playing in the background."[15] From the opening synthesizer hook, one gets the sense that Foster was auditioning for his gig with the '88 Winter Olympics.

But all this has little connection with St. Elmo's fire, which Billy (Rob Lowe) tells us "isn't real": "Electric flashes of light that appear in dark skies out of nowhere. Sailors would guide entire journeys by it, but the joke was on them . . . there was no fire. There wasn't even a St. Elmo." This metaphor reflects the illusions to which people "on the edge" cling: "They made it up because they thought they needed it to keep them going when times got tough." The speech is Billy's diagnosis of Jules (Demi Moore), who, following a manic episode buoyed by made-up stories, sits broken and shivering, wrapped in a curtain on the floor. If inadvertently, the video brings such asymmetries into almost comic relief. The fire driving Hansen finds an odd correlative in the fire burning innocuously in trashcans as the characters revisit a fire-damaged St. Elmo's Bar (formerly a place of dreams). In a direct connection between music and image, the explosive guitar chord that announces each dramatic return to the tonic—like a motorcycle engine bursting to life—is paired with effervescent and utterly superfluous blazes, such as the flame that Billy generates with spray paint and a lighter. Could we conceive of two more asymmetrical "fires" than the determination driving Hansen and the spark igniting Kevin's (Andrew McCarthy's) cigarette?

But what may seem (when looked upon so directly) an utter mismatch between movie and song may also function (when we look awry) to crystallize the film's most compelling tensions. What defines the characters' world is the absence and frustrating inaccessibility of the very concrete purposefulness of

Hansen's quest; the challenge they face is finding any mission in life that could really matter. Alec (Judd Nelson) has started working for a Republican senator in spite of being the three-year president of the Georgetown Young Democrats. Wendy (Mare Winningham) is disillusioned with social work after only weeks. Kevin wants to be a writer but, having nothing to say about life, works in obituaries, while Billy can identify no occupation beyond the glories of college. What is conspicuously missing from their world is any cause or pursuit that Parr's song could be the soundtrack *to*.

In this light, the song's forceful presence in the film evokes a kind of spectral Real, all the more tangible and efficacious for its absence. It reverberates most audibly in the journey of Kirby (Emilio Estevez). His first scene stages an encounter with his sublime woman, Dale (Andie MacDowell), who has become a doctor since their one date at college and whose smile will set his desire "in motion." This moment, for all its magic, is marred for Kirby by a personal asymmetry: "I'm a lawyer," he tells her, before recognizing the claim's incongruity with his waiter's uniform: "I mean, I'm a waiter, studying to *become* a lawyer." Parr's song commences as she leaves him to carry an injured child into the very *real* realm of the emergency room (from which a strangely orgasmic white light bursts). The film thus superimposes the sublime object of desire with the prospect of a meaningful mission in life, and Kirby's journey will reflect a short-circuiting of these objects. On one hand, his decision to switch from law school to med school to gangster's attaché (and back) is motivated by his desire to figure out Dale's desire; on the other, the very intensity of this romantic pursuit seems a product of his inability to connect with a role.

If intense desire is correlative to lack—a symptom of these characters' inability to identify their symbolic place—Žižek's logic also accentuates the inverse. Lack and excess are two sides of the same coin, just as there are two sides of "St. Elmo's fire." The sailors' pursuit of optical illusions confronts us, like the *objet a*, with the mystery of an "objective" nothing: "if we cast a direct glance at it we see nothing, a mere void," yet "viewed from a certain perspective, it assumes the shape of 'something'"; if we arrived at the place from which its splendor appears to radiate, the "fire" would disappear.[16] But St. Elmo is not simply a fantasy the sailors make up to help them cope; it is a way of integrating or gentrifying an excess that doesn't fit into their symbolic universe. What it helps them cope with is the flashes of light *per se*, giving logic and meaning to an unaccountable fiery energy that appears "out of nowhere," irreducible to any specifiable source. Transposing this dynamic inward, the key line of Parr's chorus—"I can feel St. Elmo's Fire burning in me"—designates not simply a strong driving passion but a haunting ("immortal") excess attached to the journey, out of joint with symbolic coordinates and correlative to a derailing blot in the field of vision. It is in this sense that *jouissance*, for Žižek, is not just something we never fully reach but something we never escape. In short, St. Elmo's fire finds its best reflection in a short-circuit between form and content: Parr's song is itself a relentless energy that battles in vain to symbolize its own object, unable to decide upon

a clear direction for its own excessive passion, oscillating between provisional titles as though struggling to account for its own insistent propulsion. And in this very out-of-jointness it is perfectly matched with the film's characters.

Significant here is the uncertainty of the song's ontological status. Initially non-diegetic, it is soon linked to a source, playing on the stereo at St. Elmo's Bar where Kirby returns with the others after encountering Dale. It's a hit in their world too—the characters will later blast it at a party. Again, Žižekian logic encourages a short-circuiting of two dimensions, and here we might think of Proust's M. Swann, whose passion for Odette is sparked by her conjunction with a segment of opera music. Similarly, Parr's song can be understood as something more than an extra-diegetic leitmotif—it does not simply "express" the intensity of Kirby's desire; rather, the object *of* that desire appears to assume its monumental proportions insofar as Kirby himself intersects the song with her. His pursuit (involving a succession of "wheels") is set to a kind of personalized distortion of the "Man in Motion" theme. We hear it when, in the pouring rain, Kirby follows her on his bike to a fancy party for doctors, and when, soaked to the skin, he gazes through a window into the inaccessible realm she illuminates. Simply put, one way to understand the excessiveness with which Kirby approaches romance—the Olympian magnitude of his strivings—is to recognize the short-circuit between his desire and the song. Putting a self-referential twist on Parr's chorus ("I can feel St. Elmo's Fire burning in me"), we could say that what "burns" in Kirby is the song itself.

Parr's video is most revealing when recognized as a literalization of this dynamic. It depicts Parr himself at St. Elmo's, playing the song live and thus transforming the bar—a place condensing the libidinal intensity of the characters' college days—into the song's own place of enunciation. Later, Parr will sing directly *to* the characters, sharing a moment with each and looking them in the eye. For all his comical asymmetry with this tight-knit group—or indeed because of it—the singer here embodies the dynamics of what we could call pop-song interpellation. Youth and adults alike may frequently "'find themselves' in musical structures," pairing personal events and feelings with popular songs, casting themselves as a song's addressee (however loose the connections may actually be).[17]

But again, the properly Žižekian gesture involves a speculative twist. It is not just that we supplement our lives with soundtracks (which provide "terms and templates for elaborating self-identity"), but that our lives are haunted *by* soundtracks, which, precisely in their asymmetry, exert derailing force.[18] In short, we should transpose the apparent division between the film's soundtrack and its characters *into* their world. The "Man in Motion" theme is best understood in its most literal way, as an asymmetrical soundtrack that hovers over the characters' universe, a soundtrack they appear enjoined to live up to. In Lacanese, it marks the place of a *Che Vuoi?*, confronting them with inconsistent demands, interpellating them without identifying a mission, compelling them to *do* something that matches its energy, tone, passion, scope.

This dynamic is most apparent when, after being rejected by Dale, Kirby dramatically kisses her before driving off. Mark Crispin Miller uses this scene as an example of music's "prostrating force" in 80s cinema, its effect of "imposing a certain mood (upbeat) on images that are, per se, so mundane that they would bore or even depress you if the music weren't there."[19] As Kirby drives away (into orgasmic white light), the strikingly asymmetrical music (his personalized distortion of Parr's song) "makes it sound as if he'd just won gold at the Olympics." My Žižekian approach locates the significance and impact of this moment (re-watched so frequently by fans) in the asymmetry *per se*. Critically, the music starts *before* the kiss—like a ghostly whisper it begins as Kirby is about to give up; it crescendos with his decision to turn and reach for her, such that his (excessive, disproportionate) action appears a response *to* the music (burning inside of him). It is as though he kisses her because he can't get that song—and its powerfully ambiguous injunctions to rise to some ill-defined occasion—out of his head. In this sense the moment is a perfect encapsulation of the film's bizarre emotional allure: much of *St. Elmo*'s force and pathos consists precisely in this experience of characters who behave as though driven to *do* something that could somehow match, and make them worthy of, a passionate soundtrack hovering over their lives. Is this not what renders them so sympathetic in an era that relentlessly prompts young adults to "make your life extraordinary" (*Dead Poets Society*), "take your passion and make it happen" (*Flashdance*), "be all that you can be" (US Army), and do "it all for the glory of love"?

My aim in this chapter has not been simply to apply Žižek to yet another medium but to locate a primary Žižekian "object" in the asymmetries of a multimedia form. To contend, however, that a Žižekian approach enables us to find significance *even* in disjunctions (in places where the media intersections don't quite "take") would be to remain vulnerable to charges that Žižek's engagement with media is primarily "illustrative."[20] We must argue not simply that something meaningful about human beings is reflected in these apparent mismatches but that it is *only* via such asymmetries that we can fully account for the strange success of these moments and the persistent enjoyment they offer. In multimedia, as in Lacanian love, "there *is* a non-relationship"[21]—what we'd lose with a more synchronous relationship between song and film would be the true motive force of the movie song itself.

Notes

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2. Julie McQuinn, introduction to *Popular Music and Multimedia*, ed. Julie McQuinn (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), xi.

3. Paul Grein, "Cetera Chills," *Los Angeles Times*, August 10, 1986, http://articles. latimes.com/1986-08-10/entertainment/ca-2083_1_peter-cetera (accessed May 15, 2013).

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5. Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute* (New York: Verso, 2000), 20–21.

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9. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 775.

10. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 61.

11. Alenka Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 178.

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13. "Rick Hansen Man in Motion World Tour," Rick Hansen Foundation, http://www. youtube.com/user/RickHansenFdn?feature=watch (accessed May 15, 2013).

14. Dennis Hunt, "Rocker Parr Propelled by Hot 'St. Elmo's Fire,'" *The Bulletin,* Aug 30, 1985, http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=Q7koAAAAIBAJ&sjid=vYYDAAA AIBAJ&pg=5536,253871 (accessed May 15, 2013).

15. Qtd. in Hunt, "Rocker Parr."

16. Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 12.

17. Tia DeNora, "Music and Self-identity," in *Popular Music Studies Reader*, ed. Andy Bennett, Barry Shank and Jason Toynbee (New York: Routledge, 2006), 145.

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19. Mark Crispin Miller, "End of Story," in *Seeing Through Movies,* ed. Mark Crispin Miller (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 208.

20. Noel Carroll, afterword to *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Steven Schneider (New York: Cambridge University Press), 266.

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A Little Piece of the Reel: Record Production and the Surplus of Prosthetic Vocality

By Mickey Vallee

Lacan positioned the voice as a partial object equally vital as the gaze to the constitution of subjectivity. Perceptually disembodied from yet fundamental to the subject, the voice for Lacan was one of only a few primordial phantasms that possessed the capacity to bridge (and, by consequence, simultaneously rupture) the Symbolic/Imaginary divide. The voice is, in Žižek's own turn of phrase, a "little piece of the Real."[1] Theorists who have taken up Lacan's general observations on the voice are gradually emerging, marking what appears to be a vocal turn in Lacanian cultural theory. Chion's initial film scholarship on acousmatic sound,[2] for instance, has proven influential on Žižek, who over several works situates the voice as an intruder in subjectivity, a sinthomatic contour of the maternal superego that saddles the potential for *jouissance* in the undoing of the structural apparition of the Other. Consistent amongst Žižek's diffuse writings is the following observation on the voice: it is the surplus of signification sewn to the word like a virtual prosthetic experienced all at once as pleasure and pain.[3]

I propose to contribute to the Lacanian vocal turn by examining how record production brings into being the partial object of voice as the central prosthetic feature of music, a bringing into being that displaces the possible discussion of music's aesthetic features. Using Žižek's insight of the gaze as the condition of possibility for the voice of the Other, I will frame record production as a cavernous condition of possibility for the production of prosthetic vocality through the four Lacanian discourses (Master, University, Analyst, Hysteric). I accomplish this by way of applying Žižek's undertaking of discourse[4] to processes of musical signification. In what lies below, I will argue that, while Žižek's theory serves a clearer understanding of ideological processes in music, musical signification needs to be approached as a mode of human expression

that is irreducible to the rules of neighboring social institutions. This is why I modify the discourses by means of incorporating into them a performative semiological model for music as developed by John Shepherd and Peter Wicke.[5] Using examples from the history of popular music in North America, I will illustrate the efficacy of these discourses in understanding the ideological power of music and, finally, will frame the popular music industry as hinging on the neoliberal doctrine of autonomous freedom from social commitments.

*   *   *

This chapter uses Žižek's theory of discourse to expand upon John Shepherd and Peter Wicke's performative semiological model for music. The model they propose accounts for the location of meaning in musical experience that harnesses on configurations of timbre within a sociosymbolic framework. Due to its inflexibility, I take liberties to rearrange the model according to Žižek's deployment of the Lacanian discourses in order to politicize its seemingly ahistorical character. To illustrate I draw from examples of the twentieth-century popular music industry. The kernel of Lacan's discourse is a nodal configuration of four interacting domains through which psychic reality is negotiated and maintained: the master signifier, the signifier of knowledge, the split subject, and the *objet a*.[6] Žižek's adaptation of the Lacanian discourse addresses the subject's fundamental relationship to knowledge, what it acquires, and how it knows.[7] Recall that, for Lacan, the subject refers to the constitution of the unconscious ("I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think") as it is inscribed through a habituated rationalization. There are many more aspects of knowledge that resist objective rationalization than those that conform (i.e., the insatiable appetite of desire to pursue an object only to abandon it once acquired, to find oneself in another position where the pursuit begins again). The central idea here is of the "constitutional inscience,"[8] that which prevents the subject from knowing why they are doing what they do, why they believe what they believe. Linguisticentricism is fine, but how can we apply this theory to a distinct cultural system of signification such as music? I propose an adjustment to the discourse that allows the opportunity to view music as an ideological system irreducible to neighboring social institutions. Thus, the first order of business is to supplement key terms in order to access the mechanical dimensions of musical signification: as adopted from Shepherd and Wicke, the medium in sound, the sonic saddle, the technology of articulation, and, more my own than theirs, prosthetic vocality.

Supplement 1: The Medium in Sound, Not The Master Signifier

According to Shepherd and Wicke, music signifies in a manner similar to but distinct from signification in language. If language constitutes the unconscious through the imprinted sounds of signifiers onto the bodily recognition

of signifieds, then what role can music be afforded in terms of its contribution to the constitution of subjectivity, broadly speaking? Shepherd and Wicke argue that while language signifies through sequentially based differences-in-repulsion, music unfolds according to its own spatiotemporal organization of stacked differences-in-attraction. This stacked difference-in-attraction demarcates the medium in sound through which music signifies (but it is not "music"). Shepherd and Wicke conclude that awareness of music need not be mediated through the symbolic system of language: "Awareness does not have to be capable of verbal explication in order to be assigned the status of 'consciousness.'"[9]

Supplement 2: The Sonic Saddle, Not Signifier of Knowledge

Just as the Master Signifier is quilted through the battery of signifiers in such discourses that uphold the kernel of unquestionable belief, the medium in sound is quilted through the musical moment by way of a "sonic saddle"[10] that ties a gesture into the sound that is that gesture's by-product. The saddle represents the corporeally epistemological territory of music. The ideological quilting point lends credence to the medium as possessing at once an external reality and an internal reality, then abducted by its own excess, the form through which music's fetishistic character assumes the *objet a*, or the technology of articulation.[11]

Supplement 3: The Technology of Articulation, Not the *Objet a*

The technology of articulation is the material binding between sound and meaning that is not arbitrarily destined toward the alienation of the subject, but rather thrust into the very ontological foundation of the subject's position in a material world. Shepherd and Wicke suggest that music's sounds cannot be separated from their source in the way that sound in language can because musical sound requires an utterance that is conducive with that very sound. Elements of signification as they are experienced through music do not afford the same cut; a musical sound is always-already referring to its source of articulation (i.e., the sound of a guitar rises from the object of a guitar, the sound of a phonograph emerges through a phonograph, etc.). Convention is not cut from the external world in music as it is in language, and so music has a direct symbolic power over the constitution of the subject and its metaphoric movements. Convention is tied directly into the material world.

Supplement 4: Prosthetic Vocality, Not Split Subject

In response to Derrida's claim that the voice proffers a "unique experience of the signified producing itself spontaneously from within itself,"[12] Mladen

Dolar asserts that this sort of conceptual assemblage is a panoply for the Lacanian mirror stage of misrecognition—indeed, if the auto-affection of the voice holds any resemblance to Lacan, it is between the concept of deconstruction and *méconnaissance*. The voice, as much as we symbolize it as belonging to this territory, has to be taken at the level of a discourse: it is only recognized as belonging to this "before" state from within a conscious orientation of the Symbolic toward the Imaginary. The voice rebounded becomes the remainder and the unrecognizable, the ultimate objectification in the Other. The voice exceeds the word so as to transgress and go beyond the law. This is where the drive meets desire, where excessive *jouissance* meets logos, where excess meets satisfaction rather than metonymic deprivation. Prosthetic vocality is an effect that is particular to the splitting of sound from source endemic to sound recording. It is that problematic aspect of any performance in the twentieth century: that direct access to musical performance is fundamentally impossible.

I thus reconceive of the discourses in the following manner (examples in parentheses):

MASTER (His Master's Voice)

Medium in Sound *Its "Sound"* (Master Signifier) **Agent**	Sonic Saddle *Gesture* (Knowledge) **Other**
Prosthetic Vocality *The Voice* (Split Subject) **Truth**	Technology/Articulation *The "Music"* (*objet a*) **Production**

HYSTERIC (Rock 'n' Roll Echo)

Prosthetic Vocality *The Voice* (Split Subject) **Agent**	Medium in Sound *Its "Sound"* (Master Signifier) **Other**
Technology/Articulation *The "Music"* (*objet a*) **Truth**	Sonic Saddle *Gesture* (Knowledge) **Production**

ANALYTIC (Backmasking)

Technology/Articulation *The "Music"* (*objet a*) **Agent**	Prosthetic Vocality *The Voice* (Split Subject) **Other**
Sonic Saddle *Gesture* (Knowledge) **Truth**	Medium in Sound *Its "Sound"* (Master Signifier) **Production**

UNIVERSITY (Postcountercultural)

Sonic Saddle *Gesture* (Knowledge) **Agent**	Technology/Articulation *The "Music"* (*objet a*) **Other**
Medium in Sound *Its "Sound"* (Master Signifier) **Truth**	Prosthetic Vocality *The Voice* (Split Subject) **Prodction**

Figure 8.1   The four discourses revised

Master Discourse

The medium in sound in the position of the agent clutches a law that is the unquestionable truth reflected in the sonic saddle, the silent aspect underlining its existence being the prosthetic vocality that would otherwise throw into question the bond between sound and gesture. Prosthetic vocality thus is capable of

questioning the authority of the medium by exposing its uncertainty, though such a challenge is posed by the technology of articulation, whose function it is to guarantee that *this is a musical moment* by way of the bond between medium and saddle. This discourse produces a mode of address that seeks to legitimize the medium's authority through the recognition it receives from that which is its Other, the sonic saddle. The saddle, in being addressed in such a way as to reduce its slippage of meaning to the quilting point of the medium's ideology, must revoke its own enjoyment, must renounce it, must expel any excess woven into its potential for signification. Such expelling is taken as an exploitation that produces a surplus of "pure information," whose enjoyment is benefitting the master through the technology of articulation.

Lacan concedes that the master discourse became increasingly irrelevant throughout the twentieth century,[13] suggesting different permutations to the discourse that might take its place. Evidence of its gradual disappearance is located in the beginnings of the popular music recording industry, encapsulated in the moment of *His Master's Voice*. Little Nipper's curious gaze into the cone of an RCA Victor gramophone became the pervasive emblem of sound recording in the early- to mid-twentieth century, but it is equally curious that the image has very little to do with music and precisely to do with the terror of prosthetic vocality that ruptures the authority of the medium. Embedded in a post-Gilded Age, a time that reflected on the previous decades of fervent technological fetishes, *His Master's Voice* presents us with an impossible situation: the gramophone that captivates Nipper is not a recordable device and could not have possibly contained his master's voice (the original painting was solicited to Thomas Edison, as Little Nipper initially was depicted staring into a recordable Edison device at his actual master's voice). In short, the early phonograph rested on its ability to intertwine the original event and its repetition, which by virtue of fragile cylinders would eventually dissipate and disappear, much like the organic body it mimicked.

Despite its title, the master discourse does not necessarily apply to *His Master's Voice*, though the *Truth* of the master discourse does. The kind of power that espouses from *His Master's Voice* is a power that Lacan locates as an empty seat of power, a power of democracy. Here we do not have a "People" represented under a totalitarian leader (such as the Master Edison). The place of power in democracy is empty by its basic design, impossible to represent in a complete body, yet it is a place within which any subject can enter into at any point and exercise an authority that is available to all.

But in democracy there is a kernel of malfunction. The manipulation and corruption that democracy continually unearths is actually its necessary component to be a democracy. In an election, as Žižek notes, the whole of society crumbles into a collection of determinate and abstract numbers, which suffer miscalculation and confusion, yet there is a kind of acceptance and submission to this irrational reification of the state into its representation of the rules of its own game.[14] And we submit to it. Democracy is, by its

makeup, a corrupted form because its power is empty of will. For instance, screening candidates beforehand to ensure their ethics are consistent is not democratic, and so any true democracy is impossible. It is up to the people to detect problems in the master themselves, to construct the fiction, whatever is embedded within the recording complex.

Hysteric Discourse

In the hysteric discourse, the agent (prosthetic vocality) interrogates its other (medium in sound) for its own lack in unity. The hysteric discourse is locked within an ongoing questioning of its authority—the hysteric is not responding to but seeking recognition from the authority it is challenging. In othering the master as essentially fallible, the latter is compelled to produce its own surplus, which is the knowledge that confirms the absence of its own Other (it challenges the givenness of unity between the medium and the sonic saddle, the naturalness of bond that would render the experience as innocently "musical"). In the postwar popular music industry we witness a surge of this figure: the hysteric discourse is one particularly favored by rock 'n' roll singers from the 1950s on, evidenced in songs of freedom from the obligation to commitment in relationships or conservative conventions, indeed, any politic that sought autonomy from central authority, an anarchic escape from social consequence. Part of the production, though, is lack—the sonic saddle now occupying the empty space of surplus that serves to continuously split the subject, who finds (by way of challenging the master signifier) a lack in the other that facilitates the negative freedom: a terrifying course of freedom that eventually leads to the castration, since the jubilant excess of that freedom can lead to types of freedom repulsive to the subject who initially desired them.

The hysteric discourse can be heard in the distinctive and simple recording phenomenon of the studio echo (the sound of the echo in rock 'n' roll occupies the space of the agent as prosthetic vocality). The echo in rock 'n' roll is central to the narrative of rebellion and defiance in recording techniques. The studio is a space where the ability to position oneself according to the environmental acoustics is radically eliminated by virtue of the fact that echoes and reverb can be manipulated in all stages from the performance itself to the transduction to mixing and finally mastering before distribution. A studio lacks what Blesser and Salter term the "echolocation" of everyday interactive life with our environments (the ability to position oneself in space according to the sounds that resonate off surfaces around them).[15] The norm of studio dryness arose under paradoxical circumstances, however, because engineers had every opportunity to manifest echo and reverb in pre–WWII recordings of classical music. Studio 8H at NBC Studios, Blesser and Slater observe, accommodated a large orchestra, and despite being built with flexible panels that could be moved to manipulate reverb and echo dynamics, they opted for

a dry sound that entered directly into transduction without any leakage what-soever: "Dead acoustics were the cultural norm."[16] Reverberation in particu-lar only enjoyed marginally incidental status as the effect for haunted houses and other cavernous spaces in radio dramas.[17] Dry recordings marked an attempt to faithfully reproduce the recording event without interference from engineers or "unmusical" workers in the field. In short, the connotative echo of rock 'n' roll records were almost entirely symbolic and were inscribed on the body of work as a signifier of the space (not necessarily the place) of rock 'n' roll.

Analytic Discourse

With the technology of articulation now in the place of the agent, we bear witness to the discourse of pure desire. It interrogates the subject in his or her division, precisely at those points where the split between conscious and unconscious shows through: slips, unintended acts, slurs, Freudian slips, acci-dents, mistakes, misheard information. In the clinical context, the analyst makes the patient work to locate his or her desire, to make associations that produce a new master signifier (the patient would cough up a master signi-fier that has not yet been brought into relation with any other signifier). The medium in sound suddenly appears nonsensical, grinding the listener to a standstill. The symptom that caused the standstill may present itself as a mas-ter signifier, may take on a new significance, that odd sound is no longer a leftover but becomes part of the master discourse. When the analyst discourse is in place, the sonic saddle occupies the position of unconscious knowledge, knowledge that has yet to be subjectivized, that has yet to be worked into the discourse of the subject—the sonic saddle is at its most slippery and negotiable under its own elements of signification, searching for an anchoring point. The listener is forced backed into the hysteric discourse because the technology of articulation begins to build the life of the subject as barred. Clearly the motor force of the process is the technology of articulation in its most slippery state.

In the late 1960s, musicians began to conceive of the recording studio as a canvas for challenging the musical conventions they'd inherited. Mov-ing beyond Phil Spector's propensity to use the studio as a compositional tool, psychedelic recordings in particular challenged the very existence of a musical experience by confounding the medium in sound (the recording stu-dio). Backmasking, for instance, was used in record production in the 1960s, although composers of the high art tradition had been using the technique for some time in the noise music and *musique concrète* circles.[18] Frank Zappa had used backmasking in order to avoid censorship.[19] And the most mythi-cal coordinate for this practice of doubt and uncertainty is found in the "Paul is dead!" rumors regarding the Beatles. The first notorious deception—aside from Edison's laborers yelling "Mad-Dog!" into a phonograph to hear it repeat

"God-Dam!" in reverse—was the rumor of Paul McCartney's death. In 1969, Detroit DJ Russell Gibb revealed on air that the song "Revolution 9" confirmed a rumor that Paul had died years before in a horrific car crash. Over 300 clues are accounted for, especially backmasked messages taken from a number of songs by the Beatles,[20] which create the most anxious revelation in some kind of embedded truth in the sonic saddle.

During this time studio musicians began to experiment with reversibility as an aesthetic technique and used the studio not so much as a musical instrument but as a beacon; previous recording techniques used the studio as a mirror of performance, a space within which a live performance could be more captured and less manipulated.[21] But the 1960s represents a time when some producers, musicians, and engineers began to push the limits of the studio, using it as a canvas in itself, an expressive space capable of speaking on its own, disembodied from the voices articulated into its network and capable of generating a self-expression. But what should we make of this curious practice of backmasking? On a pragmatic level it is useful for curtailing censorship, first by Frank Zappa but more in contemporary contexts where swear words and drug references are momentarily reversed in their commercial dissemination in order to obscure their more obvious reference points. In creative terms, the studio isn't a space where abstractions are finally realized for their posterity, where the artist sees the studio as a tool to capture his fleeting inspiration. It is through phenomenological interrogation, not reflective contemplation, that the sounds of songs are realized.

University Discourse

The sonic saddle here occupies the position of the agent whose Other is the excess of musical experimentation—it is experimentalism without consequence because its own excess is a severely limited one: prosthetic vocality, full acknowledgment that the recording bears a relative autonomy of its own, that it is not necessarily conducive to an experienced event. The technology of articulation's role is to justify the existence of the sonic saddle without upholding the principles of idealism. And though the ongoing themes of alienation and boredom might be the production of excess, it is for the benefit of the sonic saddle: the ongoing classification of music into genres, tropes, likes, dislikes, demographics, etc. Indeed, it is little wonder that the 1970s is the decade in which, in the music industry at least, "the art of marketing became more and more tied to the science of demographics."[22]

There were certainly grounds to believe that change was going to happen, as the hysterically relentless questioning of master narratives gave people like Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead the opportunity to say that there was a glimpse, that the doors opened for a second, and for a very short time it could be seen and heard just how grand utopia could be, just as quickly as the

doors slammed shut. After several countercultural tragedies (the stabbing at Altamont and the untimely deaths of key psychedelic performers, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and Jim Morrison), the political drive of the popular music industry went into remission. The 1970s music industry introduced a novel aesthetic framework within which musicians could dwell in the time and space necessary to accommodate forms of reflective expression.[23] The recording studio was less a medium than an instrument, a storehouse of knowledge of how to build the best effects; transductions were stored for later manipulation and sculpting.[24] And if the studio could be realized as the space of inner exploration, aligned with the psychic realignments that were so central to the counterculture of the 1960s, the festival became its radical opposite: a space where the social experimentation of communal living could couple with the anarchic space of psychic self-regulation, where the politics of inward self formation could be found on the everyday interaction.[25]

The 1970s music industry fully endorsed the rebellious nature of rock, whereas in the 1950s rebellious music constituted an anticonservative backlash and in the 1960s, a countercultural war of position. In the 1970s, the music industry as a whole profited by trusting the profanity that would sell, to anticipate a minor moral backlash from conservative and religious groups, and to profit off of the unintended publicity moral panics were known for producing. Grossing 2 billion dollars per year, the music industry earned more than the film and sports industries combined.[26] It did so by taming the surplus of excessive personal, social, and technological experimentation in a musical culture. Thus we see the edification of something we know now as *classic* rock: a timeless designation, its thematic of autonomous freedom a political expression limited by ties to a set of historical developments in recording technology, political movements, and social equality.

In relation to technological development, recording technology and overdubbing had attained such standard practice in the late 1960s that rock musicians were able to elevate sound to the status of a sublime aesthetic. The introduction of the LP record likewise allowed for more expansive work, resulting in musicians who increasingly referred to themselves as artistic visionaries, breaching the boundaries of the pop mentality regime—though it was an autonomy afforded by the far-reaching and most profitable revenue-generating decade for the music industry in the twentieth century. These technological parameters combined with the socially progressive attitudes toward sexuality and individual freedom constituted a genre of music that was a specific escapist philosophy, one that was particular to a set of emerging ethics that would eventually lay the foundations for neoliberal ideologies of self-determination. The music industry in the 1970s emerged through a series of positive reinforcements that encouraged consumers to enjoy themselves without the violent prohibition of consequence. Is it any wonder that in David Crosby's retrospective[27] he denounced drugs as having the only visible consequence, being proof that the counterculture was wrong about at least one of their ideals? Under the

university discourse, there is a radical dimension that is contained within the economic order.

To conclude on the figure of the obscene in popular music lends credibility to the unknown rebel without a cause. Lacan and Žižek are particularly useful, especially regarding the conformist politics of record production, because the Lacanian paradigm allows us the opportunity to reveal the stricture of the calcified form encased within the figure of the obscene. Žižek reads such a calcification as the right to violate the externally imposed moral law: the right to privacy and the right to exploit (the right to cheat and the right to steal, the right for corporations to pay lower tax rates than the poor despite the fact that their operative mandates as "job creators" is done by the most extreme measures of exploitation, through mineral extraction and worker destitution). The master discourse is constituted out of guilt, and is followed because I succumb to painful guilt if I don't obey. By contrast, the discourse of contemporary society is marked by a strict adherence to rules that contain a permission slip to disobey those rules—despite the fact, for instance, that corporations are responsible for the miserable conditions that they created, they create campaigns to help those who are in the most desperate need to modernize. The new form of domination is the notion that rules are imposed in order to be transgressed.

While the prohibitive superego reinforces law through state-sanctioned violence of social institutions, the injunctive superego offers an excess of enjoyment that the prohibitive superego is well aware the subject has access to. The mainstream music industry (those who dominated the industry in the early half of the twentieth century) reacted somewhat to the obscene lyrics of rhythm and blues-style rock and roll, but they reacted more strongly to the gyrations of Elvis Presley and the pumping piano of Jerry Lee Lewis; in other words, reactions were to form, not content. Throughout the twentieth century, the changes in recording techniques were a potential queering of the imaginary space of popular music: enough so that obscenity occupies a recording's central constituent and enough so that several unique intimate features of the recording now inhabited the imaginary space of the listener—the proximity of the voice, the echo, the calls for self-gratification, etc. Through record production, the ear and the throat became a more centralized location for listening. The sexual practice of auralism rests on the argument that musical signification signifies at the level of the entire body through the orifice of the ear as an erogenous zone. As the popular music industry conformed to a confrontation toward authority without the consequence of revolution, its recordings signified the contact of bodily interiors without the consequence of reproductive futurism, to borrow from Edelman.[28] That is, if the semiological argument for music is indeed correct, if elements of signification in music equate the substance of objects to touch each other through their symbiotic patterns of signification through difference in attraction, then, to quote Cusick's well-known postulate: "What if music IS sex? If sex is the only (only!) means of negotiating power

and intimacy through the circulation of pleasure, what's to prevent music from being sex, and thus an ancient, half-sanctioned form of escape from the constraints of the phallic economy?"[29] Indeed, but there are still historically contingent consequences, and those escapes from the phallic economy are firmly locked within the circulation of the Lacanian discourses.

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White Elephants and Dark Matter(s): Watching the World Cup with Slavoj Žižek

By Tim Walters

Given his famed profligacy and irresistibly broad range of high and low cultural interests, it is at least a little surprising that Slavoj Žižek has been virtually silent about football.[1] As the world's most popular mass mediated conduit of *jouissance*, as an increasingly integrated multibillion dollar node in the networks of global capital, and as a site of unprecedented ideological influence, the modern football landscape seems like just the kind of field Žižek might be inclined to turn his attention to.

This paper is an attempt to make a case for and to begin this intervention, to extend Žižek's conceptual apparatus into the world of elite football through an analysis of the multiplatform media spectacle that is the FIFA (*Fédération Internationale de Football Association*) World Cup finals in Brazil. More than half the planet watches the World Cup on television, making it an inherently revealing communal moment for our species: it has never before happened that this many human beings have done the same thing at the same time.[2] World football aspires to present its most attractive face at these events, to advance its most universalized vision of itself—no expense is spared to this end, and the spectator is witness to the awesome logistical capabilities that can be marshaled by global capital when its interests are deeply in play. However, this edifice appears to be breaking down, and the June 2013 Confederations Cup demonstrations in Brazil have played a significant role in drawing the world's attention to the foundational question of what the World Cup, and football in general, is for today. Žižek can help answer this question, and the recent protests in Brazil provide a pitch perfect starting point for this analysis, in part because the demonstrations themselves seemed decidedly Žižekian.

Few spectacles better reveal the theoretical utility of Žižek's conceptual arsenal than do the World Cup finals, and it is difficult to conceive of a more significant area of contemporary public life that has for so long largely avoided yet desperately required precisely his kind of rigorous, counterintuitive scrutiny. While football has been written about fleetingly by various critical theorists (Adorno, Barthes, Baudrillard, Eagleton, Gramsci, and so forth), thinking about football has remained nondialectical, episodic, and unsystematic. It's time that we start taking football much more seriously, and I believe Žižek's approach, with its emphasis on the "good old fashioned art" of critique of ideology, insistence upon viewing phenomena in their totality, and conception of the various registers of violence, provides a model with which to map out and begin to develop this analysis.

The trouble in Brazil started when public demonstrations against recent bus fare hikes in São Paolo were organized on June 13, 2013 to coincide with the kick-off of the FIFA Confederations Cup, an international football tournament devised by world football's corrupt and self-serving governing body to provide a financially lucrative readiness test a year ahead of the World Cup finals. Despite the transit fee hike being hastily overturned, and in spite of the swift implementation of several other pacifying measures, attendance at these protests escalated dramatically. Ultimately, 1.5 million people took to the streets in 420 protests all across the country,[3] not to celebrate Brazil's victories, but to rage against political and economic injustice through a focus on World Cup finals preparations. While there are obvious convergences between these demonstrations and the Occupy movement and European anti-austerity protests, these actions are unique for a variety of reasons. Crucially, everyone knows the demonstrations will be duplicated on a much larger scale in 2014 on the world's largest media stage, with more than 3 billion people watching, and then two years later at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. Since they will struggle to ignore them, the corporate media will do everything in its considerable powers to misrepresent these important moments. As such, it is critical to create a proper framework now within which to theorize this movement and its reasons for being.

The FIFA World Cup finals themselves are a month-long football tournament held every four years in a host nation chosen by a secret vote of FIFA's Executive Committee, typically after a protracted and almost overtly corrupt bidding process in which competing nations make lavish promises about what they will be willing to do/spend to attract the competition. Particularly since the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, increasing public scrutiny has been brought to bear on the financial costs and benefits of hosting. Generally, the widespread concern is that the costs will be very high for those living in the host nation, while the benefits will be great for FIFA (a stateless but Swiss-based institution that is neither a charity nor a business) and its multinational corporate partners. Conservative estimates suggest that the Brazilian government has already been required to spend around $13.7 billion on stadium construction, security, transportation, and infrastructure improvements. By the

time the World Cup begins in June 2014, it is officially estimated that they will have spent $16.5 billion, which (if history teaches us anything) means they will likely spend much more than this.[4] Much of this will be spent in, and to protect, the 2-km "exclusion zones" that are erected around FIFA facilities and within which they and their corporate partners can do their business and enjoy themselves without consideration for local laws or taxes.

While Brazil spends billions, FIFA is guaranteed to earn around $4 billion (tax free) in lucrative international TV rights, sponsorship agreements, and other income streams. While tens of thousands of new luxury hotel rooms and stadium executive suites will have been created, 170,000 to 250,000 citizens will have been forced from their homes in the favelas that are being razed or sanitized ahead of the tournaments by the UPP (Pacifying Police Units) and other heavily armed paramilitary forces. These disjunctures are the kernel of the conflict—host nations become production sites for these events and the Brazilian people as much as the players are the stars of the show. Yet they are also the ones paying (through their tax dollars) to have their enjoyment broadcast through global transmission networks for profit. The streets of Brazil, then, have the gaze of the world upon them, and are perfect points of strategic intervention for resisting football's increasingly central place in the neoliberal world order.

Football Ideology After the End of History

In order to frame the football protests within Žižek's conceptual matrix, the first step is to theorize the protestor's behavior as a sign of a growing refusal to only pretend to pretend to believe (and act accordingly). Žižek's conception of ideology differs substantively from theories based around "false consciousness" and those that focus on the immanence of ideology in behaviors and institutions. He posits instead an ideology that is an "elusive network of implicit, quasi-'spontaneous' presuppositions and attitudes that form an irreducible moment of the reproduction of 'non-ideological' (economic, legal, political, sexual . . .) practices."[5] For Žižek, then, ideology is the very background of thought itself, the "unknown knowns" he adds to Donald Rumsfeld's infamous "unknown unknowns:" "the disavowed beliefs, suppositions, and obscene practices we pretend not to know about, even though they form the background of our public values"[6] structure our lives, constitute the parameters of our thinking, and, thus, condition our behavior.

Another distinction of Žižek's understanding of ideology is that its defining feature is a superficially cynical perspective. For the fashionably faithless late-capitalist subject who no longer really believes in anything, "the formula of cynicism is no longer the classic Marxian 'they do not know it, but they are doing it'; it is 'they know very well what they are doing, yet they are doing it.'"[7] Žižek is relentlessly critical of this faux-cynical stance because "even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironical distance, *we are still*

doing them."[8] The cynicism of the contemporary subject produces inactivity insofar as people falsely confuse belief with action. Our society is not one that fears even the most pervasive discontent—far from it—as long as this criticism remains with the accepted *denkverbot*, or prohibition against thinking, beyond certain hegemonically determined boundaries. Žižek argues that, contra other systems of rule that limit free speech to contain dissent and ensure conformity, our contemporary cynical society is counter intuitively predicated on a healthy degree of very public critique, which paradoxically sustains the system rather than undermining it. We are encouraged to "say and write whatever you like—on condition that you do not actually question or disturb the prevailing political consensus."[9] An increasingly cynical public, purporting to be surprised by nothing and committed only to impotent gestures of weary, knowing indifference, is precisely the least equipped to *do* anything, since the very act of doing is indicative of a faith in transformation that is fundamentally at odds with the spirit of the times. Cynicism is the model of thought that corresponds most neatly (more neatly than fear, repression, or blind faith) to political passivity and apathy. It is hyperconformity masquerading as its opposite, and it is productive of contemporary systems of power.

Žižek's formulation of our intellectual *weltanschauung*, then, is "*Je sais bien mais quand même*" (I know very well, but . . .)[10]: we are encouraged to register our incredulity toward ideological constructs yet behave as we would if we really believed in them. In both the football and the wider worlds, this self-congratulatory knowingness is conservative, the contemporary ideological mechanism *par excellence* through which the informed subject allows himself to do nothing as capital does as it pleases. What happened on the streets of the 2014 host cities should first be considered as a refusal of this ideological model, a radical departure from the rules that explains the popular inability to fully account for the protests. Significantly, at the most basic level, everyone knows what the protests are about: an absence of faith in capitalism's ability to correct the problems it generates: government corruption, degraded social programs, misplaced spending priorities, and so forth. What is generating the confusion is not really why people are protesting but the fact that people are protesting in the first place. There is a football tournament happening—these people should be enjoying themselves.

One way of theorizing this refusal is to read it as a challenge to the familiar logic that the rules of the game are settled now that we are at the "end of history," when all that remains "is a politics which claims to leave behind old ideological struggles and instead focus on expert management and administration," rendering the "depoliticized, socially objective, expert administration and coordination of interests as the zero level of politics."[11] The World Cup is done the way it is done. We must simply enjoy it. *Football is not political.* It has no ideology. Thinking about the game is framed by a "virtually autistic refusal of the football world to see its own enmeshment with the social institutions and ideas of its day; resistance to seeing the game explained by

anything other than its own internal rules of chance; its meaning and signifi-cance restricted to its own protected time and space."[12] Rather, football is by consensus understood as a universal category existing outside of the space of politics that simply requires managing. Football is to be kept outside the grotty realm of politics, firewalled against Rous's napalm and atomic bombs. Apoliti-cism is FIFA policy: "political interference" in a national football association's affairs results in suspension from FIFA and all that entails and is far worse in their estimation than cheating or corruption. President Joseph "Sepp" Blatter's characteristically wounded and bewildered reaction to the demonstrations was informed by this conviction: "I can understand that people are not happy, but they should not use football to make their demands heard . . . When the ball starts to roll, people will understand!"[13]

Obviously, this is nonsense. In the post-political era it is hard to conceive of *any* endeavor more fully politicized than elite football today, as increasingly costly and spectacular World Cup tournaments demonstrate. Football is fully enmeshed in the systems of global capitalism: it relentlessly seeks out new and innovative ways to engage with corporate driven consumerism and is demon-strably liberal in its cultural views (sporadically promoting anti-racism, anti-homophobia, anti-sexism campaigns, superficially respecting local cultures, doing cursory charitable work, and so forth) and at the same time fanatically neoliberal in its economic ones (persistent refusal of the very idea of economic regulation, disinterest in restricting the commodification of the game, encour-agement of systemic tax avoidance, and so on).

Indeed, while repeating the mantra of apoliticism, Blatter (1998–2014) and his corrupt predecessor João Havelange (1974–1998) have used FIFA to shape international football into its present rapacious and unlovable form during their reign, making the beautiful game ugly by pervasively synchronizing it with the interests of capital. It is crucial to emphasize that football was not always thus, and that the ways it has recently changed parallel shifts in the global economy and in Western culture:

> [t]he game has simultaneously served as an exemplar of the new economy, an instrument of civic, regional and national identity, a vehicle for personal and political promotion, but in the early twenty-first century it has increasingly begun to show another face . . . the sheer scale of corruption, collusion, decep-tion, incompetence, fraud, and forgery in the game has become apparent. Beneath the gloss of its newly acquired desirability . . . football may yet force us to face the Continent's underbelly: its unreformed clientelism, its closed and self-serving elites, its deficient democracies, its shallow consumerism, its desperate inequalities and its systemic racism.[14]

This ideological mirroring of football and global capitalism—particularly in the assumption that each has reached the terminus point of their development, rendering them apolitical and placing their existence as beyond question—is

not an incidental concern, because football is not simply another cog in a much larger ideological machine, another industry that has been turned to profit. Rather, it is the world's most popular cultural phenomenon, the thing we most enjoy doing and watching others do together. It belongs to the commons. Football, and what we make of it, matters.

World Cup for Who?

So, what is it about their football or their world that has driven these particular protestors to the streets? What are they refusing to pretend to pretend to believe that is sufficient to drive them to confront a highly militarized police force deploying tear gas, pepper spray, concussion grenades, hails of rubber bullets—a preview of the $900 million Brazil has spent on beefing up its already robust security apparatus for the tournament—and why? The rallying cry of the Brazilian Popular Committees of the World Cup is instructive here: "World Cup for Who?" The standard economic narrative regarding World Cups is that while the upfront spending necessary to secure them often seems gratuitous, host nations ultimately benefit from this expenditure in a variety of indirect trickle-downs over many years and immediately through improved infrastructure. Slick technocrats make familiar arguments about increased international tourism and commerce over many decades, about benefits to local businesses and therefore workers during the events themselves, about increased revenue for all through increased taxes and so forth. And so the case is made for the construction of lavish oversized new stadia, palatial hotels, improved infrastructure, and so on. There are also the less quantifiable benefits of hosting international tournaments such as the kinds of dizzying upsurges in levels of national(istic) pride beloved of elected politicians. So what is the problem, and is it valid?

There are many, and they are absolutely valid. The socioeconomic merits of hosting are not a difference of opinion—those involved in the process do not have a different view that can be convincingly argued. Rather, they are pretending to believe that which they know for a fact to be untrue, because without this element of misdirection the entire fraudulent racket would collapse or require seismic, systemic change. How so? Most obviously, it's not possible for a nation to make money hosting a World Cup. The tournament's boosters articulate the same claims made by all nations preparing to host: "'politicians' prophecy an 'economic bonanza.' They invoke hordes of shopaholic visitors, the free advertising of host cities to the world's TV viewers and the long-term benefits of all the roads and stadiums that will get built."[15] Although this same line of rhetoric regarding the twin pillars of increased tourism through global branding and improved infrastructure remains the standard narrative, the problem with this argument is that it has repeatedly been shown to be demonstrably false.

As countless analysts have now made clear, a nation will not make money hosting a World Cup. Indeed, one never has.[16] FIFA will definitely make money, and lots of it. Its official corporate partners (multinationals such as Coke, Adidas, Budweiser) and certain local big businesses (especially construction companies and anyone involved in real-estate speculation and development) will likely make lots of money. But it is virtually impossible for the economic impact on nations to be a net positive, primarily because of the nature of the vast outlays and in part because even the much touted hypothetical benefits are of the unquantifiable, intangible, trickle-down variety. Suffice it to say, FIFA's benefits are of a less ephemeral and abstract variety. As South African sociologist Ashwin Desai has pointed out regarding his government's decision to host the 2010 tournament, *maybe* tourism will improve in the years after the World Cup and *maybe* the infrastructure spending will improve the economy, but FIFA's profits are of the old-fashioned, paid up front in hard Swiss currency variety.[17] During the last World Cup, FIFA sold the TV rights to the competition for $2.9 billion and received another $1.3 billion for sponsorship and other merchandising rights, earning them $4.3 billion before the first ball was even kicked. Curiously, this is almost exactly as much money as the South African government spent to host, although it remains to be seen how much of this will ever come trickling back to them.[18] Refuting the standard narrative of the pitchmen who sell these events, an extensive body of research concretely demonstrates that hosting a World Cup is going to cost your taxpayers quite a few billion dollars, and quite a few billion dollars more than you estimate, and all reliable indicators suggest that this is exactly what will happen in Brazil. The role of the politician/booster here is to pretend to believe, while the public may choose to do likewise or assume its standard role of pretending to pretend to believe, grinding its teeth in frustration before settling in to enjoy the show. The protestors have chosen something different. As Eduardo Galeano recently argued, "Brazilians, who are the most soccer-mad of all, have decided not to allow their sport to be used anymore as an excuse for humiliating the many and enriching the few."[19]

It is worth considering that World Cup viewers around the world find themselves in a similar ideological predicament, one that ought to be more conflicting than it seems to be. We know that the party is being paid for with the scarce resources of the Brazilian people. We also know that the advertising spectacle that pervades every moment of the tournament conceals loathsome production chains, that multimillion-dollar boot-and-kit sponsorship deals conceal the grotesquely exploitative reality of the global commodity chain of deadly sweatshops and child labor. We know that the tournament today is first and foremost about money, in which the players and fans have been rendered into the medium that will supply the precious mindshare of half the planet to corporations flogging sugary drinks, bad beer, consumer electronics, and ruinous credit instruments. We know that FIFA's trite platitudes about being committed to using the power of football to make the world a better place are

patently dishonest, but that they will still walk away with over $4 billion to do with as they please. We know that football has become hypercommodified, a grotesque symbol of the obscene inequalities of global consumer capital. We know that today the people's game is bread and circuses, but we are nevertheless to act as though none of these things *really* matter once the games begin—that our enjoyment is so great that our politics must be set aside. This seeming disconnect between one's avowed beliefs ("Modern football is rubbish!") and actual behavior ("Come on England!") is the defining ideological feature of the contemporary subject. We believe all of this in part because it seems things could not be otherwise, or at least we cannot conceive how they could be. For Žižek, the generalized acceptance of this logic is the ultimate triumph of capitalism, the creation of a state (/of mind) in which everything whatsoever is possible except even very minor changes to the economic organization of our society. Our role is to pretend to pretend to believe that it is okay that this is so.

The sacrosanct notion that football has no ideology is made no less fatuous each time a football dignitary repeats it, yet the notion of football as apolitical, as transcendent, is deployed ad nauseam in popular representations of the game. It is utilized in almost all commercial advertising about football, for instance, a genre built upon an idealized image of football's capacity to unify across (and thus erase) socioeconomic borders, and particularly in its obscene and ubiquitous fetishization of poor children playing football with some raggedy object in favelas or dusty African streets. Football is the great equalizer here and the great anesthetic, but hosting a World Cup so close to these romanticized sites threatens to rupture this illusion, to make globalized football's often monstrous ideological commitments unbearably visible.

Romário de Souza Faria, the footballing great and current Brazilian Socialist Party Congressman, noted that hosting this party in actuality feels more like facilitating a direct transfer of wealth, a daylight robbery, from the poor to the rich:

> FIFA is the real president of our country. FIFA comes to our country and imposes a state within a state. It's not going to pay taxes, it's going to come, install a circus without paying anything and take everything with it. They are taking the piss out of us with our money, the public's money. The money that has been spent on the Mane Garrincha stadium could have been used to build 150,000 housing units."[20]

Romário is spot on: they are taking the piss. How could they possibly expect anyone to see it otherwise? This is the very crux of the issue. If people en masse are no longer able to even pretend to pretend to believe in modern football's transcendent value, then how else might politico-economic decisions made on its behalf be theorized? For Žižek, the answer is: as violence.

Football's "Dark Matter"(s): Differing Registers of Violence at the FIFA World Cup Finals

Discussion of violence in football typically refers to its more spectacular manifestations: fan hooliganism and, less often, particularly nasty on-field behavior. However, the amount of attention given to these obvious conflicts has at times obscured other lines of inquiry about what it means to host the World Cup finals, particularly those ways of thinking that pertain most directly to the communities where these events physically take place, just beyond the (aptly named) zones of exclusion that FIFA claims as its own during the tournaments. A useful theoretical perspective through which we might view the hosting of World Cup finals is Žižek's conception of "objective systemic violence," an approach that must be grounded in a comprehensive examination of the actual relationship between host nations and the communities of which they are constituted.

Žižek is interested in systemic violence, that which operates as a near permanent fixture in the background of elite contemporary football and exerts an incalculable effect over the lives of many more people than its more spectacular manifestations but which is less subject to critical analysis. In *Violence*, Žižek writes: "[a]t the forefront of our minds, the obvious signals of violence are acts of crime and terror, civil unrest, international conflict. But we should learn to step back, to disentangle ourselves from the fascinating lure of this directly visible 'subjective' violence, violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent."[21] He counsels us instead to focus on objective

> *"systemic" violence, or the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems* . . . Objective violence is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent. Systemic violence is thus something like the notorious "dark matter" of physics, the counterpart to an all-too-visible subjective violence.[22]

Football has a history of spectacular violence. Its development has been blighted by eras dominated by fans clashing with each other and the police and by too many episodes of tragedies caused by aging infrastructure. Since football became a media staple/big business, its governing bodies have struggled to break the link in the public imaginary between football and physical violence. While much has been said about this kind of violence elsewhere, the point is worth making that the line dividing football authorities from state power has always been permeable, so that the enterprise of making the game less subjectively violent is one that has typically been undertaken by football's governing bodies working symbiotically with local police, paramilitary, and private security firms. In this context, the aggression against the Brazilian protestors by these forces should be read as an attempt to use subjective violence to subdue criticisms of objective systemic violence.

It is also worth acknowledging that those who rule football often work best with those who rule its fans most cruelly. FIFA has never been shy of aligning itself with some of modern history's most subjectively violent rulers—indeed, it seems to prefer them. Havelange's[23] and his protégé Blatter's insistence on the avowed "apoliticism" of world football has resulted in a truly dismal track record in this regard.[24] Perhaps most obscene was FIFA's endorsement of Jorge Videla's reign in Argentina by allowing the 1978 World Cup finals to remain hosted in Argentina in the wake of his coup and during his murderous rule, which saw the abduction, torture, and murder of an estimated 30,000 leftists and critics of the regime—the *desparecidos* (the disappeared)—between 1976 and 1983, often beneath the very stadiums where the games were to be played. At a FIFA banquet following the tournament, and *after* Amnesty International had provided FIFA with "a fully documented report that detailed the torture, kidnapping and murders committed at the orders of the military junta," Havelange "eulogized [what he took to be a picture perfect] . . . tournament and observed 'Now the World has seen the real face of Argentina.'"[25] Football knows violence but has increasingly tried to submerge it, preferring of late the systemic over the subjective variety.

Žižek's focus is on those forms of global violence that are less visible. The world's attention is too easily drawn to more photogenic, subjective violence: at the 2013 Confederations Cup, the media focused on the bloody and explosive clashes between the protestors and the increasingly aggressive Brazilian police force, utilizing the familiar iconography of media riots (burning cars and buildings, gangs of police in riot gear beating demonstrators with clubs, Molotov cocktails, and so forth). A week after the smoke dissipated, the coverage did too. But Žižek would have us concentrate on the objective systemic violence(s) generated by mega-events that are too often overlooked (and not just at the World Cup, obviously), that are present before, during, and after the television coverage, that are in fact taking place right now. How might expanding our comprehension of violence allow us to perceive these events differently?

The previously mentioned tournament is instructive in this regard, particularly given that early fears about the finals being marred by subjective violence against visiting fans by African criminals were proven to be largely unfounded. Viewed from a different angle, however, the 2010 World Cup finals were perhaps both more and differently violent than predicted insofar as they demonstrated that, while the new South Africa might be a nice place to visit, you wouldn't want to live there. This is a country that has the world's highest death rate and one of its highest murder rates (almost 20,000 people per year), its highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rate (which has a life expectancy almost 20 years below the international average); it is the second least equal country on earth, with 24% unemployment, 50% youth unemployment, half of the population living in poverty, and millions living in shacks with no water and electricity.[26] In this context, how else might we think of the billions spent needlessly by the South African government and the billions taken from the tournament by

FIFA but as an act of class-based aggression against the people of South Africa? As Žižek says: "[t]herein resides the fundamental systemic violence of capitalism, much more uncanny than any direct precapitalist socio-ideological violence: this violence is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their 'evil' intentions, but is purely 'objective,' systemic, anonymous."[27] *This*, then, is the World Cup violence we should be worried about—the 330,000 South Africans who died of HIV/AIDS on Thabo Mbeki's watch because he chose to spend their money on building FIFA some white elephants rather than buying antiretroviral medications for his people—the baseline violence that is a matter of course, upon which the entire system is in this case *literally* built.

World Cups conspire to conceal the human misery and pain that is involved in their creation, which, if it surfaces at all, can easily be dismissed as simply the way of the world, the cost of doing business and a necessary evil. Brazil is a huge country geographically (fifth in the world), economically (eighth in the world), and in terms of its population (fifth in the world), with socioeconomic problems to match.[28] Contra the media's focus on Brazil as an economic success story with a booming middle class, they are eighty-fifth in the world on the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI)[29] and are ranked sixty-ninth in the world in the Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International.[30] How many millions of Brazilian lives might the billions spent on hosting have saved or improved had that money instead been invested in health care, sanitation, social services, or education?

A Žižekian approach to the World Cup suggests that for host nations and FIFA to continue to behave as they have been is to treat football as a weapon with which to wage war against the poor while the rest of the world experiences this violence as a party it watches on television. The challenge today, both within football and without, is ensuring that this necessary displacement is no longer possible, that we work to perceive these tournaments in their totality, and that the violence that sustains them be recognized and responded to as such. It seems strange to say, but the world does not need a World Cup, and we certainly don't need the kind FIFA have been giving us. Football does not belong to them: it belongs to us. What is required is a conception of the beautiful game that situates football properly, in the context of the commons. We can easily find ways to make football in general and the World Cup in particular a more ethical spectacle, one not just about privatizing profit—which is to say, less objectively, systemically violent in the Žižekian sense. If not, then it should cease to be.

Notes

1. The extent to which Žižek is disinterested in football can be witnessed in an excruciating radio interview with Alan Minsky of "The People's Game Radio Show" about Slovenia's participation in the 2010 World Cup Finals: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjkLhoYWxBE

2.   David Goldblatt, *The Ball Is Round: A Global History of Football* (London: Penguin, 2007), x.

3.   Anthony Lopopolo, "What Did We Learn from Brazil's Dress Rehearsal for the World Cup?" *A Football Report*, http://afootballreport.com/post/54431773740/what-did-we-learn-from-brazils-dress-rehearsal (accessed July 2, 2013)

4.   Marina Amaral and Natalia Viana, "Why Are Brazilians Protesting the World Cup?" *The Nation*, June 21, 2013, http://www.thenation.com/article/174936/why-are-brazilians-protesting-world-cup#axzz2XqFWLowu (accessed June 22, 2013).

5.   "The Spectre of Ideology" in Slavoj Žižek (Ed), *Mapping Ideology* (London: Verso, 1994), 15.

6.   Slavoj Žižek, "What Rumsfeld Doesn't Know That He Knows About Abu Ghraib," May 21, 2004, http://www.lacan.com/zizekrumsfeld.htm

7.   Žižek, "The Spectre of Ideology," 8.

8.   Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 30.

9.   Slavoj Žižek, "Afterword: Lenin's Choice," (167) in Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Slavoj Žižek (Ed.) *Revolution at the Gates: A Selection of Writings from February to October 1917* (London: Verso, 2002), 165–336.

10. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 217.

11. Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (New York: Picador, 2008), 40.

12. Goldblatt, xiii.

13. Dave Zirin, "Brazil: Yes, Blame the Damn World Cup," *Dissident Voice*, http://dissidentvoice.org/2013/06/brazil-yes-blame-the-damn-world-cup/ (accessed June 25, 2013).

14. Ibid., 688.

15. Simon Kuper and Stefan Szymanksi, *Soccernomics*, (Philadelphia: Nation Books, 2012), 267–268.

16. In the recent "mega-event" era, the World Cups held in the United States in 1994 and Germany in 2006 are generally believed to have come the closest to breaking even, primarily because neither had the massive construction expenses (either of stadia or of infrastructure) mandatory elsewhere. However, it has never been convincingly argued that either country actually *made* significant money from hosting.

17. Interviewed in Craig Tanner, *Fahrenheit 2010: Warming Up for the World Cup in South Africa* (2009. Levitation films/ Journeyman Pictures, 2010), DVD.

18. Three years out the numbers are very far from promising. Nowhere near as many visitors arrived as was estimated. The massive "FIFA-grade" stadiums constructed for the tournament have become enormously expensive white elephants, as is invariably the case. The $395 million Soccer City in Johannesburg seated 94,736 for the final between Spain and the Netherlands, but it was only able to attract an average of 14,556 fans for Kaizer Chiefs matches in the following season, at which rate it can never recoup the millions spent on its construction. For a thorough analysis of the extent to which these publicly funded stadia become white elephants as a matter of course, see Jens Alm, "World Stadium Index," *Play the Game*. http://www.playthegame.org/theme-pages/world-stadium-index.html (accessed May 10, 2013).

19. Dave Zirin, "Why Are Brazilians Protesting the World Cup?" *The Nation*, June 21, 2013, http://www.thenation.com/blog/174999/eduardo-galeano-speaks-out-brazils-world-cup-protests# (accessed June 26, 2013).

20. Ibid.

21. Žižek, *Violence*, 1.

22. Ibid., 2 (emphasis added).

23. The wealthy son of a Brazilian arms dealer, Havelange rose to fame as a swimmer at the Berlin Olympics, an event that he predictably admired very much: "The organization. The attention to detail. The efficiency. The Berlin Games was one of the most excellent spectacles I have seen in my life. Everything was grandiose and perfect." David Yallop, *How They Stole the Game* (London: Constable, 2011), 28.

24. These two FIFA presidents have had friendly relations with a veritable who's who of dictators and war criminals: including Augusto Pinochet in Chile, Hugo Banzer in Bolivia, the military leaders of the successive dictatorships that ruled Brazil between the 1960s and the mid-1980s, Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, Muammar Qadaffi in Libya, Charles Taylor in Liberia, General Than Shwe, the leader of the Burmese military junta, and Sani Abacha in Nigeria. The FIFA president (Havelange) was actually in Nigeria with the president in the days before he authorized the murder of the Ogoni leader Ken Saro-Wiwa and his Ogoni Nine colleagues in November 1995, drawing worldwide condemnation: "[I]n Prague two days after the hangings Havelange said defiantly, 'I will not let politics affect my promise to award the 1997 World Youth Soccer Championships to Nigeria. Sport and politics should not be mixed.'" Andrew Jennings, *Foul!: The Secret World of FIFA* (London: HarperSport, 2006), 63.

25. Yallop, *How They Stole the Game*, 190.

26. Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2008), 258–259.

27. Žižek, *Violence*, 13–14.

28. "The World Factbook: Brazil," Central Intelligence Agency, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/br.html (accessed June, 2013)

29. "Human Development Index: Country Profile: Brazil," United Nations Development Program, http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/BRA.html (accessed May 20, 2013).

30. Unsurprisingly, the 2010 and 2018 World Cup hosts nations are similarly blighted by massive inequality and corrupt institutions: South Africa is tied with Brazil for sixty-ninth, and FIFA has awarded the next event to Russia, ranked a dismal one hundred thirty-third, behind such international bastions of good governance as Uganda and Sierra Leone. South Africa is one hundred twenty-first and Russia fifty-fifth in the HDI rankings. See "Corruption Perceptions Index 2012," Transparency International, http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2012/results/ (accessed May 15, 2013).

Part III

Film and Cinema

Contingent Encounters and Retroactive Signification: Zooming in on the Dialectical Core of Žižek's Film Criticism

By Fabio Vighi

Film for Žižek works as a kind of magnifying lens, revealing to us the formal structure of consciousness and the mode of appearance of reality. Although Žižek has engaged in depth with the art of cinema, venturing into film theory and focusing on specific film authors,[1] his many filmic references, as a rule brief and sharp, serve the purpose of clarifying psychoanalytic and philosophical issues. This, however, should not deceive us on his "use" of cinema: it is not merely that Žižek's writing on film is ancillary to philosophy, but it points to a *philosophy of film* that is deeply embedded in Žižek's *forma mentis*. Žižek's critics contend that his treatment of film shows little to no respect for the specificity of single films or for the filmic medium as a whole.[2] As I have argued elsewhere,[3] what this criticism misses is not only the inherent originality of Žižek's contribution to film studies,[4] but also the argument that a Žižekian "film theory" is worth pursuing if we aim directly at the core of Žižek's thinking, since the latter is implicitly cinematic, in other words, its dialectical coordinates center on the problem of *mediation*.

Most of the critical work on cinema inspired by Žižek, or on "Žižek and film," has so far focused on psychoanalytic theory. While with this piece I want to further delve into the significance of a symptomatic reading of film, I also intend to make a pledge for a dialectical approach, which brings us directly to Žižek's use of Hegel and opens up a retroactive conceptualization of cinema. In this respect, the main notion I will deploy is a central reference in Žižek's interpretation of

Hegelian dialectics, namely the relation between contingency and necessity. I will seek to demonstrate that the theory of film one can derive from Žižek hinges on the dialectical inspiration that grounds his thought as a whole.

Cinematic Fantasy, A Double-Edged Sword

In respect of the heavy psychoanalytic artillery deployed by Žižek's film criticism, its underlying reference is no doubt Lacan's notion of fantasy. Filmic fantasy works for Žižek as a complex and somewhat magical mirror of reality, encouraging us to locate the most fundamental mechanisms that determine our relation to the world. Through the medium of filmic fantasy we can (1) grasp the constitutive epistemological role of the "fictional cloth" that structures our "being in the world" (Žižek's thesis that reality is necessarily framed by fantasy), and (2) isolate the ambivalent yet intrinsically traumatic dimension of the Real (mostly missed in our ordinary experience) as condensed in splinters of cinematic fantasy that embody reality's ontological negativity. It is therefore crucial to appreciate how, in its mediating role, cinematic fantasy for Žižek is self-split, divided between its pacifying function and a recalcitrant excess that, as it were, "gives form" to—and, consequently, offers us a glimpse of—the ontological "crack" upon whose repression the illusory notions of subjectivity and objectivity are constructed. Film plays with two contrasting yet interrelated types of fantasy, each engaged at different levels in a mediating function vis-à-vis the "zero level" of reality.

Here is how, in *Less than Nothing*, Žižek refers to the two fantasies:

Fantasy 1 and fantasy 2, symbolic fiction and spectral apparition, are thus two sides of the same coin: insofar as a community experiences its reality as regulated or structured by fantasy 1, it has to disavow its inherent impossibility, the antagonism at its very heart—and fantasy 2 gives body to this disavowal. In short, the success of fantasy 1 in maintaining its hold depends on the effectiveness of fantasy 2.[5]

This reasoning, which drives Žižek's theory as a whole, can be fruitfully applied to film. In doing so, we should pay particular attention to the status of fantasy 2, the "spectral fantasy." If with fantasy 1 things are, in Lacanian terms, fairly straightforward, with fantasy 2 the ambiguity is radical. The spectral dimension of fantasy, in Žižek, is both the last fantasmatic veil before the irredeemable negativity that grounds being *and* the very place where this negativity is announced in all its traumatic evidence. Because of this overriding ambiguity, fantasy qua spectral apparition can signify both the disavowal of the traumatic Real and its disruptive embodiment.

What Žižek's take on fantasy reveals, then, is nothing less than his deeply antagonistic ontology, articulated around the short-circuiting of the "dead" space of meaning that supports our existence (film/reality as symbolic/

imaginary construct) and the "vital" gaps of the Real, negotiated by concretions of spectral fantasy that shore up, and at the same time potentially disrupt, meaning itself. In *The Fright of Real Tears*, Žižek makes this point apropos the notion of "suture":

> The ultimate gap that gives rise to suture is ontological, a crack that cuts through reality itself: the "whole" of reality cannot be perceived/accepted as reality, so the price we have to pay for "normally" situating ourselves within reality is that something should be foreclosed from it: the void of primordial repression has to be filled in—"sutured"—by the spectral fantasy.[6]

What Žižek highlights is the ambiguity of the suturing operation, since the spectral fantasy that "plugs the hole" in order to generate reality and meaning is, in its deepest configuration, a symptom, which as such also threatens to explode the very reality framework it supports. We refer here to symptoms not as ciphered messages but, in the most radical Lacanian sense, as *sinthomes*, kernels of pure enjoyment addressed to no one, representing the subject's enjoyment of its unconscious.[7] Given this theoretical standpoint, film has a chance to unearth the basic dynamics of our immersion in reality, insofar as this immersion is decided in the decentered fantasmatic kernel that functions as an invisible "hinge" to what we perceive as our life-world. Below is a much-cited passage in which Žižek describes this potential in relation to dreams:

> if what we experience as "reality" is structured by fantasy, and if fantasy serves as the screen that protects us from being directly overwhelmed by the raw Real, then reality itself can function as an escape from encountering the Real. In the opposition between dream and reality, fantasy is on the side of reality, and it is in dreams that we encounter the traumatic Real—it is not that dreams are for those who cannot endure reality, reality itself is for those who cannot endure (the Real that announces itself in) their dreams.[8]

Here we only need to replace "dream" with "film" to obtain the logic at work in Žižek's approach to cinema. In fact, immediately after this passage we find the following commentary on the ending of Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*: "while fantasy is the screen [that] protects us from the encounter with the Real, fantasy itself, at its most fundamental—what Freud called the 'fundamental fantasy,' which provides the most elementary coordinates of the subject's capacity to desire—cannot ever be subjectivized, and has to remain repressed in order to be operative."[9] If film's principal function is to reproduce the spell of fantasy that structures reality, thereby mirroring the intrinsically ideological *closure* of our world, at the same time (and this is the essential point) such closure is deemed inseparable from the potentially destabilizing *excess* embodied by the repressed fantasmatic core.

Ultimately, the theoretical and political efficacy of Žižek's thought is decided in this "knot" where the potential for a radical break with a given

"fantasy" overlaps with the element that decrees its (ideological) closure. In political terms, this ambiguity prevents Žižek from locating the exact modality of rupture with the reigning ideology, consequently inhibiting the (no matter how tentative) formulation of alternative sociosymbolic scenarios. In terms of today's economic crisis, for example, this translates as the inability to determine whether the crisis stands a chance of bringing down our worn-out capitalist social order or whether it will actually strengthen it. While we know how the hinge works, we are unable to establish whether it is a weak or strong one. As anticipated, Žižek's theory is at its best when it points to the structural "soft spots" or symptoms of the social. While this theory's insistence on identifying with these symptoms is testament to a desire to "rewrite the script" of our *Lebenswelt*, the new script remains unavailable. The inherent ambiguity regarding the "subversive potential" of symptoms contributes to hampering the creative step concerning the theorization of an alternative scenario. This logic is deeply embedded in the way Žižek conceives of and writes about film. In what follows I argue that the somewhat incestuous relationship between the two fantasies, which provides an ideal entry point to Žižek and film, should be transposed onto the plane of Hegelian dialectics if we are to further explore what is at stake in Žižek's passion for the silver screen.

My specific point is that the two levels of fantasy mentioned above incarnate the two pillars of Žižek's dialectic, namely the necessary "fictional" closure of meaning and the inerasable, contingent, potentially explosive negativity that structures signification. While these two aspects cannot co-exist, at the same time they are dialectically bound. Thus, for Žižek, epistemology is fictional and positive, while ontology is Real and negative—and yet the two dimensions are as inseparable as two sides of the same coin. What makes Žižek's notion of the "ontological crack" original is precisely that it must be conceived as dialectically inseparable from—indeed, speculatively identical with—its symbolic counterpart. It is at the level of this speculative identity between Symbolic and Real, between the *whole* and the *hole*, that Žižek's Hegelianism achieves its most stunning results. And, in relation to cinema, it is Žižek's daring dialectical vision that sustains his hardly concealed predilection for the Hollywood film-commodity.[10]

Dialectical Short-Circuits

One of the most recurrent philosophical references employed by Žižek to discuss the link between wholeness and negativity is the Hegelian dialectic of contingency and necessity. In Žižek's interpretation of Hegel, in order to appear as necessary (i.e., to provide a reliable background to our existence), a contingent event must "change the (way we perceive the) past"; it must create its own conditions of possibility by retroactively "choosing" a chain of events that supports it, making it appear inevitable. The theme of the retroactivity of signification via the temporal short-circuit of the passage from contingency

to necessity has been central to Žižek's project since its inception. We already find it in his breakthrough volume *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, under the Hegelian topos of "positing the presuppositions." The subject's empirical activity, Žižek contends,

> is possible only if he structures his perception of the world in advance in a way that opens the space for his intervention—in other words, only if he retroactively posits the very presuppositions of his activity, of his "positing." This "act before the act" by means of which the subject posits the very presuppositions of his activity is of a strictly formal nature; it is a purely formal "conversion" transforming reality into something perceived, assumed as a result of our activity.[11]

What appears to us as objective reality "out there" is actually a by-product, a sort of epiphenomenon, the outcome of our invisible formal manipulation by means of which we have set up a framework where we can affirm our subjectivity. What we recognize as objective reality has always-already been *scripted* by us, turned into a fiction through a disavowed decision.

In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, this logic is nicely exemplified by the retroactivity of naming: what confers an identity upon a given object is not an intrinsic positive quality of the object but the contingent act of naming it: "it is the name itself, the signifier, which supports the identity of the object."[12] Any parent knows that the identity of their child—what makes the child unique in their eyes—is ultimately guaranteed by the name; once the name is chosen, it retroactively organizes the multiple features of the child into one recognizable mark. This is why it seems as if the name we choose was always almost "genetically" inscribed in the child's body, since no other signifier could capture the child's "essence." Here, then, contingency and necessity overlap. How? It is the contingent choice of naming that, by retroactively "covering" the nameless past, buttresses the child's identity in all its necessary evidence. And, to give the example a cinematic twist, could we not deduce that naming turns subjects not only into individuals, with distinct psychological features, but more crucially into *actors*, in the precise sense that a name is necessary to allow a human being to enter the screen we call reality? Reality is identical to cinema precisely because each of its "objects," including human beings, has always-already been at least minimally "gentrified," adapted to fit a given fictional/symbolic narrative, a script.

This is the sense of Žižek's often-rehearsed dialectical point that "the crack in the big Other is the subject": subject and object overlap in this crack, in the ontological contingency of reality, where the subject is called upon to establish a suture (or quilting) by way of, literally, "stitching together the edges of the ontological wound/crack," and retroactively triggering signification. This is, of course, the role performed by what Lacan calls the "master-signifier," the signifier that retroactively "quilts" or pins down the endless sliding of the signifiers.

Let us consider our experience as moviegoers. When watching a film, all of a sudden we perceive a detail in the story that "sticks out," thus triggering

in our heads a "signifying chain," seamlessly (re)arranging the meaning of the story, conferring a specific sense or "coloring" upon the images that pass before our eyes. This is not to be understood merely in straightforward narrative terms (as in the obvious case of, say, detective stories), but rather as a kind of poetic transcendental experience: we suddenly, unexpectedly, "read" a message in the film, quite independently of its actual narrative "truth" or "message." In Žižekian terms, we should emphasize that, as a symbolic or representational construct, film (just like reality) works (makes sense) retroactively, since the "meanings" it acquires depend on the retroactive causality ignited by fictional elements that are first perceived as *contingent* and become *necessary* the moment we (re)order (i.e., subjectivize) film in a certain way.

This suggests that the above dialectical operation is at the heart of filmic interpretation, inasmuch as the meaning of the object-film is "transcendentally" constituted via the intervention of the synthetic faculty of the subject. This dialectic is not only subjective but also objective: the film's meaning cannot be defined as a pre-existent idea imposing itself onto objective reality; rather, *the way* a film "objectively" expresses its content retroactively generates its meanings by calling the subject/spectator into question, asking us to make sense of what we are watching. According to this logic, film acquires meaning through the very process of its articulation, which involves, first and foremost, a short-circuiting solution akin to what Kant called "transcendental synthesis": as we watch, the images on screen are mentally "processed" *before* the intervention of our critical reason, "synthetically symbolized" *in advance*. This *a priori* synthetic operation, which the mind disavows, necessarily accompanies all "spontaneous" cinematic perceptions, while preparing the ground for conscious critical activity.

The disavowal is crucial in Žižek's reading of Kant: film (reality) emerges as an object of knowledge only on condition that we remain ignorant about the elementary subjective operation that opens up the space for knowledge. As Lacan would have put it, knowledge is fundamentally opaque. As a form of representation, then, film would seem to amount to a "transcendentally constituted" fiction, insofar as its precondition is a subjectively imposed illusion that seals the "ontological crack" and allows the object-film to emerge as an epistemological entity. The consequences for so-called "spectatorship theory" are radical. As a rule, the viewer engages with film as she engages with reality, namely by disavowing that special agent famously named by Kant "this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks"[13]—a precursor to the unconscious. The moviegoer is therefore plagued by an irreducible yet necessary self-ignorance. Blindness is the condition for seeing (and, by the same token, misrecognition is the only way of knowing). This, then, is the basic "idealist" position endorsed by Žižek: my conscious knowledge of an object (film) takes place against an invisible epistemic backdrop that the mind has set up in advance, in an act of synthetic apperception that remains inaccessible to consciousness.

Such position, however, needs to be further specified. In *The Ticklish Subject*, Žižek focuses with utmost clarity on the radically contingent nature of the disavowed synthesizing act carried out by the subject. While "the synthetic activity of our mind *is always-already at work*, even in our most elementary contact with 'reality,'" we should not forget that "the unity the subject endeavors to impose on the sensuous multitude via its synthetic activity is always erratic, eccentric, unbalanced, 'unsound,' something that is externally and violently imposed on to the multitude . . . In this precise sense, every synthetic unity is based on an act of "repression," and therefore generates some indivisible remainder."[14] Žižek's conclusion is that the synthetic power of transcendental imagination, which imposes order onto the infinite, "mad" complexity of reality, coincides with the disruptive power of "pure imagination itself, imagination at its most violent, as the activity of disrupting the continuity of the inertia of the pre-symbolic 'natural' Real."[15]

It is crucial here to emphasize that, for Žižek, Kant's "transcendental turn" does not designate a positive mediation between subject and object of knowledge, but rather relies on a contingent (erratic, eccentric, unbalanced, unsound) decision, "a certain *salto mortale*, or 'leap of faith,'"[16] which at once closes and stealthily preserves the openness of the situation. Against prevalent interpretations, Žižek reads Kant not as a metaphysician obsessed with the categories of thought and universality, but as the first thinker of the intrinsically excessive and destabilizing dimension of *cogito*. What Kant (unwittingly) makes visible, for the first time in the history of philosophy, is that the universe is ontologically open, and that the subject of *cogito* is precisely the name of this "crack"—the paradox being that the out-of-joint kernel of the subject (transcendentally) grounds universality. Thus, the assembling power of our imagination, which turns chaos into a necessary symbolic order, amounts to an utterly contingent gesture whose disruptive force is ultimately embodied by the indivisible remainder it gives rise to. And, within this context, retroactivity is the form through which our contingent choice becomes necessity. How, then, is all this relevant to film analysis? With film, as anticipated, we have a chance to zero in on the most elementary logic responsible not only for the emergence of signification, but more crucially for the freedom to radically resignify a given symbolic context. At its purest, (filmic) interpretation itself has to do with this freedom.

Psychoanalytically speaking, to truly engage with a film we need to intervene at the level of its unfathomable "symptomatic knots," which do not seem to have a proper place in the narrative. Why? Precisely because, in line with what is argued above, every process of (retroactive) filmic symbolization secretes "parts of no part," excessive elements that disrupt the film's symbolic texture and demand that such texture is rewoven again and again. Crucial is how contingency acquires the semblance of necessity, as the film's symptom overlaps with the mind's "suturing" intervention. Take Žižek's observation

about the "enigmatic episode" in Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) when Madeleine is seen by Scottie as she opens a window, but then "inexplicably disappears from the house." While we would be hard pressed to place this scene within any plausible interpretation of the film, it nevertheless can produce new meanings. Žižek reads it as an unconscious precursor to the famous scene of the appearance/disappearance of the mother's silhouette in *Psycho*, adding that the old lady who plays the hotel clerk in *Vertigo* should, consequently, be read as a "strange condensation" of Norman Bates and his mother in Hitchcock's later masterpiece.[17] Or consider Žižek's ingenious approach to Robert Altman's filmic universe, which reads its dominant traits of despair, anxiety, and alienation as a joyful immersion into a "multitude of subliminal intensities." A film like *Short Cuts* (1993), for example, is structured around "contingent joyful encounters" that, however, are not representative of "the depressing social reality depicted" but rather testify to "Altman's communism, rendered by the form itself."[18] Filmic contingency itself is what allows Žižek to propose a new interpretation of Altman's cinema as a whole.

We are now in a position to risk the definition of a "retroactive dialectic" in cinema. Film is first constructed as an attempt to signify (to give form to an idea or intuition) that will overlay reality's ontologically inconsistent multiplicity; this effort of symbolization is always based on a degree of repression (i.e., it is "transcendentally" constituted) and therefore produces a recalcitrant excess, a cinematic symptom qua "wound it professes to heal";[19] the symptom/wound, by derailing symbolization, generates meaning through forcing a recalibration of the filmic context itself. It is crucial to perceive this sequence not as linear but circular, since the initial symbolization is always-already coincidental with the final act of interpretive recalibration; in other words, the meaning of every film is decided retroactively. The only point to add is that symbolization (and, with it, repression) comes first, simply because the substantial "excess qua lack" is given to us only as a disruptive "return of the repressed"—as a symptom. What this means is that there is no interpretation without a symptomatic element impervious to interpretation (as with the odd window appearance of Madeleine in *Vertigo*), an element embodying both the abyssal lack to itself of the object of knowledge and the utter contingency of the subjective decision that grounds interpretation. As, against our hubris, it hinges on contingency, the act of interpretation produces a meaning that is as reasonable as a tautological statement. Ultimately, as Žižek would put it, "it is as it is," for we need to perform an "abrupt" interpretive gesture to suture the potentially infinite resonance of the symptom within a signifying chain. We should be careful to notice the finesse of Žižek's Hegelian point: it is not merely that interpretation is a strategic matter of persuasion, of imposing one's views, but that the strength of an "objectively meaningful" argument is decided by a tautological gesture that, as it were, disappears in the presumed objectivity of the argument.

With regard to film, the short-circuit investing the subject-object relation is central to our argument. It is impossible to treat film as a detached object

of knowledge not because it is a subjective fiction belonging to someone else (e.g., the director), or its "true" objective meaning is beyond our ability to grasp it, but because we viewers are always-already included in its objectivity, for it is the intervention of our "synthetic imagination" (Kant) that makes it exist "objectively." It is not merely that we watch a film and attempt to decipher its meaning(s), but, much more uncannily, that we always-already are in the film, included in its objective existence; we are not external viewers, but the object-film exists only insofar as it incorporates our gaze.[20]

In relation to the topic of the gaze, we therefore need to update the 1970s and 1980s "apparatus theories" inspired by psychoanalysis. We are not referring to the spectator's gaze as manipulated by the filmic apparatus, but a gaze that, as it were, manipulates itself by disavowing its own necessary participation in the creation of "filmmaking." Lacan's gaze is the blind spot in the picture that, insofar as it remains invisible, sets up the illusion of meaning. This gaze is the subject itself performing its elementary role of vanishing mediator, establishing a signifying network and simultaneously erasing its presence from such network. The upshot of this operation is necessary misrecognition—the illusion that subjectivity (spectator) and objectivity (film) exist as separate entities, while the foundational excess/lack at the heart of both subject and object is recanted. Erasing the traces of one's active presence in objective reality (be it film, society, politics, and so forth) is the decisive act that sanctions the birth of subjectivity and objectivity, while at the same time providing the elementary ideological framework that sustains our existence. It is illusion as necessity—illusion coincidental with reality. What we call reality, in its "heavy" existential materiality, is a virtual screen, a fiction kept together by a disavowed knot where the "madness" of the subject and the abyssal contingency of the world overlap.

This is what Lacan's symbolic castration amounts to: an invisible cut through which we "miraculously" organize the chaos of reality into a medium, a symbolically-consistent world—consistent enough to support our existence. Reality pops up for us the moment the cut of symbolic castration becomes operative. A landscape, a face, a film are what they are for us (they make sense) because we have always-already determined their basic epistemological coordinates, embedding them into an at least minimally familiar symbolic framework. Along these lines, is not editing the filmic equivalent to the swipe of symbolic castration, creating the fictional space where meanings have a chance of being articulated?[21] Editing is tantamount to a deadly wound (or, as Freud and Lacan would have put it, "the cinematic letter kills"). As a succession of imperceptible "crimes," editing displaces the negative kernel of representation into the invisible interstitial gaps between shots. Each film cut contributes to the creation of film-sense by attempting to erase the infinite complexity of the Real. In such cuts, then, a contingent subjective decision is sublated into the necessary illusion called film. Editing confirms that film, like reality, is a fictional structure whose objective consistency is negotiated reflexively through

its relationship with its own foundational void. The meaning of our life itself is the result of a series of editing cuts—which, of course, produce symptoms.

The Form of Change

So what is the exact status of symptoms? Žižek's dialectical answer is that a symptom is "the object which is the subject": a paradoxical object that stands for the "ex-timate" (both intimate and external/excluded) core of the subject, the inaccessible and inerasable hard (objectlike) nugget of what we are. The Lacanian name for this enigmatic thing is, of course, *objet a*. The invisible short-circuit that supports our being in the world, then, hinges on our expelling "out there" the unbearable objectal excess that inhabits us. Likewise, a film exists as an object of knowledge because it "hosts" the surplus of our subjectivity. Insofar as it stands for the Lacanian *objet a*, the evanescent object-cause of (visual) desire, its role is to neutralize the substantial void of reality itself, while simultaneously absorbing enough of this void to guarantee its appearance as a mysterious, spectral, even deathlike object.

It is at this stage that we are able to appreciate the relevance of symptomatic objects as concretions of *jouissance*—an excessive enjoyment always referring us back to its impotence, its being mediated by lack. Žižek's recurring point is that these symptoms both sustain and haunt the consistency of our world. Insofar as they embody the "too-muchness" of life, they support the consistency of our lives by remaining disavowed; however, when we over-identify with them they also threaten such consistency—things lose their comforting plasticity, the smooth fiction that escorted us into the world begins to jam, cracks become visible. It is with regard to the disturbing side of symptoms that Žižek returns to Hegel and the retroactive power of necessity. When reality overlaid with its necessary fictional fabric begins to crack and spectral formations appear through the fissures, we have a chance to change the future (to determine a different future for us) by changing the past.[22] This is how, in Hegelese, contingency "sublates itself" into (a new) necessity.

The cut introduced by the object of desire is neither repressed nor "embalmed" or fetishized, but instead preserved qua lack at a substantial level, insofar as our entire existence is now structured around it. At the same time, this operation turns the contingent encounter with *objet a* into a necessary one by transforming our past. We are able to endure the "magic and madness" of *objet a* only if our past itself is reconfigured from the perspective of this encounter that has changed our future. Our earlier certainties, beliefs, fears, and so on are transformed by this event to account for its necessity—our life now makes sense only in the light of such event.

The whole point is that while I cannot choose directly what I will become in the future (how I will change from the perspective of the present), as that would entail bypassing the subjectivation-through-the-Other process, I can nevertheless, upon the destabilizing encounter with a symptom, disconnect with the Other and embrace one of my past history's unactualized signifying

chains. The truly hard thing to do, then, is to perceive my cause, "my private Idaho," the very anchoring point of my identity (qua Other), as virtual, and therefore "rebootable." Simply put: liberation hinges on the realization that I am as rebootable (virtual) as the big Other.

However convincing it may sound, this theoretical argument is characterized by a degree of political ambiguity. If, as Žižek argues, the future can only be changed through the past, we need to stress that retroactivity also works as a conservative force embedded in our *modus vivendi*, constitutive of the strategic preservation of our symbolic order—we tend to automatically adjust (rather than reboot) our past to accommodate contingent events and choices within it. Is there a way of knowing when symptoms can be spared the conservative logic of integration/repression and instead function as harbingers of a different signifying chain? From Žižek's angle, the answer can only be negative: it is impossible to know what a symptom might trigger. While an ethical act amounts to "enjoying the symptom," or assuming its foundational negativity, it is difficult to see (1) why this would happen (instead of further repression or conservative adjustment) and (2) what it would entail (in terms of retroactive re-signification).

As a rule, Žižek refers to drive as the Freudian category that compels us to enjoy rather than repress the symptom, thus opening up the potential for radical change. Yet, even the endorsement of the painfully liberating dimension of drive does not manage to dispel the cloud of ambiguity enveloping the "sobering morning after": what content will formal rupture bring? If the form of Žižek's argument is intrinsically (and consciously) ambiguous with regard to its political use, perhaps its emphasis on the disruptive quality of drive needs to be supplemented with a drive that resignifies the past—an urge to install new master signifiers. When we are faced with a contingent event or symptomatic "opening" of a given situation (the obvious example, today, being the economic crisis) the freedom we suddenly have to reconfigure our past in order to change the future is fully legitimated as freedom only by our choice of content, in other words, by the narrative that we are able to conjure up in the strategic battle that will decide which past will determine us. The choice of the new master signifier is as crucial as the opening. Politically speaking, then, what is at stake is the urge to engage strategically and creatively in the struggle for a better past, even though the actual content of this struggle will emerge through the articulation (which implies an at least minimal "betrayal") of our narrative.

The Ambiguity of Symptoms

While the above dialectical logic informs Žižek's writing on cinema (and on popular culture as a whole), it does so implicitly. One of the tasks ahead for film theorists who take Žižek's method seriously is to make that method explicit in connection with film analysis. One way of doing so is to measure Žižek's point about necessity as contingency against the notion of film as cultural commodity. Precisely as a commodity, film embodies a meaning that is, ultimately,

coincidental with the ideology of capitalism and, as such, needs (where possible) to be rewritten. Precisely because film is a commodity, we should enjoy it in a different manner from that which it prescribes—we should avoid blind "ideological" enjoyment and instead focus on the film-commodity's intrinsic self-contradictions. The latter method, which Žižek employs, aims at bringing to the fore not our enjoyment but the (disruptive, self-contradictory) enjoyment of the commodity itself. *It enjoys*, that is, it produces symptoms ("truths") that are beyond its ideological radar.

This is the Lacanian "it speaks" of film: the symptom speaks through the film texture, in the sense that it makes itself visible by revealing the inconsistencies of that texture. The filmic texture, from which the symptom arises, is by definition ideological, since it relies on the big Other. Its efficiency, which alone can provide meaning, is the "being spoken" of film, its emerging from the network of signifiers that constitute external reality. This is how we should understand the academic cliché that "film reflects society": films are disconnected *fragments* of the big Other, just like dreams are a series of disjointed quotations from the waking experience.

So is there such a thing as originality in cinema? The very fact that every film is sustained by the big Other would seem to suggest a negative answer: art cinema and Hollywood movies share an absolutely necessary reflexivity. If the big Other is always-already there, then every filmic representation is, strictly speaking, a quotation, "the illusory effect of prosopopoeia, of the fact that the subject's discourse is a bricolage of fragments from difference sources."[23] This observation unearths the underlying argument behind Žižek's "passion" for Hollywood: any presumed substantial difference between art cinema and commercial movies collapses, since they are both "quotations from the big Other." Here, however, we should return to the primacy of symptoms. The question to ask in relation to the prosopopoeia of cinema is: which "impossible" feature has morphed into a symptom, so that film could impose an illusion of consistency onto its always-already mediated narrative? This symptomatic feature, as anticipated, makes itself available as a hard kernel of *jouissance* that resists inclusion in the symbolic order. Its ambiguity lies in the fact that it quilts ideology by providing its anchoring point in enjoyment, *and* it potentially disrupts the ideological fiction by demanding its retroactive reconfiguration. This object that no mirror could ever reflect should be theorized as central to filmmaking for the simple reason that it is central to our living experience.

To give another example, Žižek argues that the libidinal focus of Hollywood disaster movies such as *Deep Impact* (1998) is not the spectacularization of disaster, but the seemingly obverse feature of the "production of the couple."[24] Instead of directly theorizing Hollywood's fascination with catastrophe, one should focus on the decentered libidinal focus (the couple and its antagonism) that "bribes" us into accepting the ideological enjoyment of the film.[25] We should insist that this decentered "symptom" is both what secretly anchors our ideological enjoyment and what suggests

that "another reading is possible," one that would disprove and potentially rewrite the ideological one. Provided we are able to locate a given film's symptomatic excess, we would seem to be presented with two options: we either accomplish the critical task of disclosing the film's ideological lure, or, taking a little but crucial step further, we make use of this symptom to generate an altogether alternative reading, changing the suturing or quilting point. Are not these two options the two avenues available to Žižek's politics? The first one replicates the work of critical theory, while the second adumbrates the properly revolutionary theoretical move.

In relation to how Žižek reads disaster movies, we can bring back the two fantasies previously introduced: the fantasy about disasters, which of course is contextually true (it is embedded in our fragile life-world), is framed by an uncanny fantasmatic symptom, which is real in that it defies interpretation. In Žižek's example, the real is Lacan's Real of sexual difference, the antagonism cutting across the relation between the sexes. It would be interesting to compare Žižek's analysis of *Deep Impact* with a "European disaster film" like Lars Von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011). As Žižek himself has put it, *Melancholia* is paradoxically an optimistic film because it endorses the negative foundations of being. Far from embodying pointless nihilism, our acknowledgment of the radical contingency of life—its underlying emptiness, the fact that we can be "sucked (back) into the void" at any time—amounts, for Žižek, to the key step toward a truly ethical act. The planet that eventually collides with Earth is, like the gigantic wave in *Deep Impact*, the symptom itself, the force of negativity which no structure, symbolic order or meaning can contain.

A patent example of symptomatic negativity in film is provided by Žižek's reading of the Cohen brothers' *No Country for Old Men* (2007). Žižek reads the figure of the ruthless killer Anton Chigurh, played by Javier Bardem, precisely as a self-referential, in itself utterly meaningless symptom representing the unfathomable contingency of life. The key to Žižek's interpretation is provided by the exchange toward the end of the film between the killer and the hero's wife. The killer informs her that her fate depends on the tossing of a coin. After he flicks the coin and asks her to call it, she replies that the coin has no say in her destiny, since he has already decided to kill her, to which he retorts, "I got here the same way the coin did." As Žižek reads it, "he, his will, *is* like the coin," meaning that there is no psychological depth in the character, no pathological reason behind his evil acts. He is not

> a real-life person, but a fantasy-entity, an embodiment of the pure object-obstacle, that unfathomable X of Blind Fate which always, in a weird mixture of chance and inexorable necessity, as the necessity of chance (bad luck), intervenes to undermine the fulfillment of the subject's plans and intentions, guaranteeing that, one way or another, things will always somehow go wrong.[26]

To expand on this point, we should consider the film's previous "coin toss" scene, when Chigurh stops at a gas station and engages in an increasingly tense

conversation with the old shop owner, eventually asking him to call the coin toss because "everything depends on it." When the old man calls it right, Chigurh leaves without hurting him (and without paying for the petrol). The final part of the conversation is worth quoting in full:

CHIGURH: What's the most you've ever lost on a coin toss?

PROPRIETOR: Sir?

CHIGURH: The most. You ever lost. On a coin toss.

PROPRIETOR: I don't know. I couldn't say.

(Chigurh digs in his pocket, finds a quarter and tosses it. He slaps it onto his forearm but keeps it covered).

CHIGURH: Call it.

PROPRIETOR: Call it?

CHIGURH: Yes.

PROPRIETOR: For what?

CHIGURH: Just call it.

PROPRIETOR: Well, we need to know what it is we're callin' for here.

CHIGURH: You need to call it. I can't call it for you. It wouldn't be fair. It wouldn't even be right.

PROPRIETOR: I didn't put nothin' up.

CHIGURH: Yes you did. You've been putting it up your whole life. You just didn't know it. You know what date is on this coin?

PROPRIETOR: No.

CHIGURH: 1958. It's been traveling twenty-two years to get here. And now it's here. And it's either heads or tails, and you have to say. Call it.

PROPRIETOR: Look . . . I got to know what I stand to win.

CHIGURH: Everything.

PROPRIETOR: How's that?

CHIGURH: You stand to win everything. Call it.

PROPRIETOR: All right. Heads then. (Chigurh takes his hand away from the coin and turns his arm to look at it).

CHIGURH: Well done. (He hands it across.) Don't put it in your pocket.

PROPRIETOR: Sir?

CHIGURH: Don't put it in your pocket. It's your lucky quarter.

PROPRIETOR: Where you want me to put it?

CHIGURH: Anywhere not in your pocket. Or it'll get mixed in with the others and become just a coin. Which it is. (He turns and goes. The proprietor watches him leave).

While the exchange emphatically confirms that Chigurh (qua chance) *is* the coin that has been travelling just to get there (or, in Lacanian terms, the "letter that always arrives at its destination"), the key line is Chigurh's "You've been putting it up your whole life. You just didn't know it." What could he possibly refer to? To the knowledge about the owner's life choices that Chigurh extracted from him in the previous part of the dialogue (he had married into his job, since the small business he now runs belonged to his wife's father). This insight introduces the dialectical short-circuit I have been referring to: it is not just that "fate strikes" from the outside, like lightning, but that the choices one makes are always-already interventions into contingency, into fate itself. By making those (opportunistic) choices, the old man had (necessarily) "sutured" the abyssal existential openness of his life, an openness that he is now confronted with, again, in the figure of the killer.

The sense we impose upon the overflowing "too-muchness" of life involves, at a level of knowledge that remains foreclosed, a clash with the furious madness of contingency. The Bardem character reminds us that, against the rule of (common) sense, "blind fate" is inside us all the time—we can tame it, but not rid ourselves of it. In fact, Chigurh embodies the *return* of the force of contingency (the symptom) from within one's minimally ordered world. Later in the film, just before killing Carson Wells, Chigurh listens to Wells's pathetic last-ditch attempt at saving his skin (he claims he knows where the money is and could get it to Chigurh very quickly). Chigurh, however, bashes Wells's hopes with the following calm remark, "You know what's going to happen now. You should admit your situation. There would be more dignity in it." Eventually, just before shooting, Chigurh asks Wells, "If the rule you followed brought you to this, of what use was the rule?" If indeed our killer does stand for pure contingency, he also seems to demand that old rules are discarded and new ones invented. The conversations Chigurh entertains with his victims suggest that fate opens up the possibility of reconfiguring the meaning of one's life. "Your lives," he effectively tells them, "are a series of contingent choices you turned into necessity"; "the rule you have been following amounts to nothing but the contingent conversion of contingency into necessity, and I am here to remind you of this underlying truth!"

In psychoanalytic (Lacanian) terms, then, Chigurh occupies the position of the analyst qua *objet a*, the "strange attractor" that brings each character face-to-face with the "irrational" excess that runs their lives. The dignity he refers to before killing Wells has to do with the ethical stance of accepting that "there is no big Other," that our (corrupted) desire (for money, since everything in the film revolves around the classic booty) is based on nothing but itself, on pure tautology, which Chigurh represents. We should push this logic to the end and recognize in Chigurh's appearance precisely an ethical stance, for what is at stake in his intervention is the *potentiality* of radically "rewriting" the meaning of (one's) life. Chigurh is a figure of subtraction—not because he kills people in the manner of a serial killer, but because he takes away from them their

symbolic consistency, forcing them to confront the dark contingency sustaining their lives. In cinematic terms, he is correlative to the fantasmatic Real as previously introduced, just like planet Melancholia in Lars von Trier's film. His ghostly presence (in the course of the film he is aptly described as a ghost who is nevertheless real) indicates that he stands for the last veil of fantasy (or last form of appearance) before reality's self-contraction.

More to the point: are not his confrontations with other characters so many scenarios where the fundamental fantasy is played out? Almost invariably when a character meets Chigurh, the situation that ensues, before the character's demise, resembles a scenario of "subjective destitution," whereby the character is forced to assume his fundamental fantasy qua passive kernel of his being. This limit fantasy-position of utter, unbearable passivity, where we are reduced to an impotent object of the other's *jouissance*, is the disavowed fantasmatic kernel of our being which, insofar as it remains disavowed, structures our "normal" activity, supporting the network of fantasies and desires that make up our subjectivity. The encounter with the fundamental fantasy, then, is traumatic because it frees us from the alienation constitutive of our subjectivity (since the latter is always mediated by the big Other) therefore allowing us, at least in principle, to reconfigure it radically. Assuming our fundamental fantasy is subtraction at its purest, for there we encounter the disavowed kernel of our being, the impossible/Real object that is "in us more than ourselves" and, as such, has to be excluded from reality if we are to relate to it.

To conclude, we can return to the political ambiguity of Žižek's theory of retroactive liberation. It is a theory that relies on two fundamental steps. First, we must be able to assume the symptomatic kernel of a given symbolic order. Secondly, we must gather the creative energy to think a new (socio)symbolic context to emerge from the implosion of the previous one. The ambiguity resides in the first step, inasmuch as it hinges on wresting the symptom away from the mind's conservative tendency to adapt it to the existing signifying chain (the status quo). The mind's synthetic faculty tends to make sure, through a prereflexive, "transcendental" act of conversion, that what is radically other is immediately gentrified, naturalized, and thus integrated into the existing framework of sense.

The operation of wresting away, then, in itself traumatic, is at the root of any revolutionary rearrangement of reality—suddenly, the whole symbolic fabric from which the symptom arose is rendered inefficient and potentially replaced, retroactively, by a new one. This is why we should resist the temptation to turn Chigurh into a symbol, even as a kind of deadly or divine nemesis of the corrupted American way of life. Much more profoundly, as a symptom he *is* the American way of life since the latter is founded on a series of betrayed or unactualized causes. As condensed in the coin toss dialogue with the old man in the gas station, through his enigmatic presence, akin to that of a modern Sphinx, Chigurh demands that that way of life is rewritten—that new rules are invented to replace the old ones (together with the "old men" of the title).

While this is only the first step toward the actualization of freedom as complex activity of profound restructuring, it nevertheless captures the necessary form of liberation.

Notes

1. The main example of Žižek's engagement with cinema is his book on Kieslowski (see Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears*, 2001). Other than that, among his favorite and most referred to film directors are Hitchcock, Lynch, Chaplin, and Tarkovski.
2. See Bordwell, 2005; Heath, 1999; Lebeau, 2001; Bowman and Stamp 2007.
3. See Vighi, 2009.
4. See McGowan, 2007 and Flisfeder, 2012.
5. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 2012, 685–6.
6. Žižek, *Fright*, 2001, 71.
7. In Lacan, the decisive shift took place with the seminar *L'angoisse* (1962–63), where symptom goes from being a linguistic message to be deciphered (inasmuch as it refers to the unconscious "structured like a language") to a jolt of untranslatable *jouissance* that, as such, provides the crucial support for the subject's symbolic/imaginary identifications.
8. Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 2006, 57.
9. Ibid., 59.
10. It would be pointless here to enumerate the endless references to Hollywood films scattered in Žižek's books. While Žižek clearly enjoys watching commercial films, he does so also because, owing to their narrative and ideological closure, they lend themselves to counter-intuitive (symptomatic) readings more easily than art films.
11. Žižek, 1989, 218.
12. Ibid., 95.
13. Kant, 1978: A346.
14. Žižek, 1999: 33
15. Ibid.
16. Žižek, *Parallax*, 2006, 21.
17. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 2012, 557–8.
18. Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, 2010, 379.
19. In *Tarrying with the Negative*, Žižek summarizes the disruptive effect of symbolization thus: "the Symbolic opens up the wound it professes to heal" (Žižek, 1993: 180).
20. Lacan develops his theory of the gaze as object in *Seminar XI* (see Lacan, 1998: 67–119).
21. I develop this idea in relation to Pier Paolo Pasolini's theory of editing in *Traumatic Encounters in Italian Film* (2006: 15–29).
22. see Žižek, *Parallax*, 2006, 203.
23. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 2012, 514.
24. see Ibid., 654.
25. See also the chapter devoted to Hollywood in *In Defense of Lost Causes* (Žižek 2008: 52–94).
26. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 2012, 658.

How to Kill Your Mother: *Heavenly Creatures*, Desire, and Žižek's Return to Ideology

By Cindy Zeiher

Ideology and *Heavenly Creatures*

Heavenly Creatures is a New Zealand film based on the actual murder of Honora Parker (also known as Honora Rieper) in 1954 Christchurch. Honora was a working class woman who, together with her husband, ran a boarding house where they raised their children. Over time, her relationship with her teenage daughter Pauline grew fractious and volatile due to a developing, intense, and encompassing friendship Pauline had made with her classmate, Juliet Hulme. Having immigrated from England to New Zealand and having formed this friendship with Pauline during the early 1950s, Juliet fell ill and the decision was made by her parents that she should go to live with her Aunt in South Africa, thus potentially separating the girls. Despite this decision being made by both Juliet's parents, the girls' despair and hatred focused on Honora as the key barrier to their imminent separation. So much so that Pauline and Juliet lured Honora into Victoria Park, in Christchurch's Port Hills, where they bludgeoned her to death with a brick stuffed in a stocking.

It is important to understand that 1950s Christchurch was a notably conservative Christian city. This murder still lingers as an undercurrent to Christchurch's history both for its brutality—after all, who would actually carry out the killing of their own mother—and for the events leading up to the murder. In particular, the intense friendship has been the subject of many debates among those authors attempting to make sense of why the murder happened. Filmmaker Peter Jackson and screenwriter Fran Walsh provide a film interpretation of the Parker-Hulme case by directly implicating fantasy as integral

to the narrative. In this way, Jackson and Walsh not only confront the viewer with Lacan's question: *Che vuoi?* [what do you want?] but they also provide an encounter with possible responses lying within the domain of the ideological consciousness of the time. At this juncture, fantasy and ideology are conflated and function as the organizing mechanism for subjective desire.

In order to explore constructions of desire in twenty-first century New Zealand, I interviewed participants all from New Zealand following a viewing of *Heavenly Creatures*. The function of this chosen film was to provide not only a visual projection of desire but also to elicit constructions of desire as reiterated in commentary made by participants. Participants' accounts of how they relate to constructions of desire set against their lived experiences begin to emerge as their ideas of desire unfold within and outside the film text. These articulations are ideologically organized. Fantasy is introduced in order to tidy inconsistencies that desire presents, so it is manageable within the Symbolic order. Ideology in this instance works both at the level of knowledge and as a critique of knowledge in that participants do not necessarily trust their own narratives if they feel their empirical grounds are precarious.

When speaking about desire, words confront, frustrate, and obscure lived realities. This becomes more apparent the more one speaks. Although this speech might initially point toward the symbolic function of the film text, it certainly prompts imaginary identification, even with the recounting of past events. *Heavenly Creatures* serves as a particularly poignant film to elicit knowledge of desire because participants can relate to either the memory of the event itself or at least resonate with the incident and the shadow it casts on the historical and social fabric of New Zealand.

The retroactive viewing of a film for the purposes of eliciting what desire could possibly mean for participants is in itself an important Lacanian act. Žižek approaches the challenge of understanding desire through his critique of ideologies in contemporary times; this has potential for transformative theoretical development and for the possibility of understanding subjective desire. Žižek says of the relation between desire and cinema that cinema "doesn't give you what you desire, it tells you how to desire."[1] He maintains that ideology frames fantasy within social conditions and relations. Rex Butler[2] offers that Žižek's critical return to ideology is best approached by considering antagonism toward those signifiers that underpin understandings of what constitutes society. For Žižek, ideology presupposes a subject's experience of the social world, and in this way ideological connections with objects, social artifacts, and other subjects have the potential to express repressed desires, which in turn underlie interpretations of the social world. This explanation accounts for understanding "reality" as already symbolized. Such symbolization implies a repression, and it is from this that opposition and antagonism emerge.

For Žižek, a return to uncovering repressive forces must necessarily recognize antagonistic forces as representing ideologies that disguise an official "reality." At this juncture, Žižek refers to reality being traumatic, and a horrific

Figure 11.1   Pauline (Melanie Lynskey) about to strike the first blow to Honora (Sarah Peirse) in Victoria Park. Still from *Heavenly Creatures* (1994).

encounter with the Real: "[s]omething unfathomable, 'more real than reality itself', reveals ideology to be more than 'mere ideology', as opaque to analysis as the kernel of a dream."[3] In this way Žižek argues for Lacanian psychoanalysis as a method from which the Real can potentially be uncovered. This position, he argues, demystifies ideology and evokes us to reveal and critique complex circumstances and attitudes that are otherwise presented as unproblematic.

Much of the script for *Heavenly Creatures* is composed from a diary found by police following Pauline's and Juliet's arrests, which were a few hours after they confessed to the murder. The diary entries are both revealing and chilling and were used strategically throughout the film, not to shock viewers but to remind them of the subjective destitution Pauline was experiencing at the increasingly apparent prospect of losing her friend. Pauline's realization that the only way to act in accordance to the misrecognition of herself is to kill her mother is a poignant and stunning moment. Her decision to surrender to her internal conflict gains momentum after the event itself; subjective fragmentation is exacerbated by the act of murdering as Pauline steps out of the wheel of desire to create radical distance from the sacrificial figure—her mother. No enlightenment or subjective wholeness is achieved and no ethic of enjoyment realized, only the most awful pragmatic truth that a daughter has killed her mother and in doing so undertakes a most radical stance. In this way she admits the truth, however violent, of the gap within her split subjectivity.

In a world where ideology mediates between the true subjective horror—the tension between social moralities and inner life—Pauline and Juliet attempted, naively, to interrupt the awful event that was to take place—their separation. The promise and fantasy of the great moment—the death of Honora Parker—is articulated as a neurotic obsession in order to maintain that there would be no repercussions and that hopefully, repressive ideologies would disappear. As they strike the first blow, the murder is depicted in the film as a momentary

surprise to the girls, as they assume that in hitting Honora on the head, she would simply die. Of course this is not so. Honora screams with pain and distress as the girls repeatedly hit her over the head until she is dead. The killing represents more than just a protest against their plight; it is an appeal to remain in a hysterical space while we, the viewers, watch with utter horror and powerlessness.

Ideologically this murder violated the strategic thinking of the time—Christchurch was cushioned within safe, conservative, regulated, and reliable social systems; everything was decided by those in power, although their means of yielding and exercising power was unknown to most. Such ignorance serves an ideological purpose as Žižek purports. One can live pleasantly enough within the bounds of constructed morality to convey the illusion of safety. Honora Parker is a typical figure from within this system; she believes in it and lives according to its rules. Ironically, however, it is these very ideologies that structure the meaning to her murder. Those *point de capiton* (suturing points) that Christchurch apparently reveres—the Church, family, education, and the rituals that maintain them paradoxically serve to question the very symbolic structures in which fantasy thrives. Pauline and Juliet refuse to be subjective reproductions of mundane structures, and this perplexes those around them, notwithstanding the rebellions that those people attempt to disguise themselves: Pauline's parents are not married, Juliet's mother is having an affair with her counseling client, and her father is being dismissed as rector at Canterbury University.

Most New Zealanders have seen Peter Jackson's film *Heavenly Creatures*. The Parker-Hulme case is one of the most perplexing and curious amongst New Zealand crimes. The aftermath of the murder provides an interesting insight into what might be considered a progressive justice system for conservative-leaning New Zealand, influenced as it is by English legal traditions and practices. Following their admission of guilt and their sentencing, Juliet and Pauline are sent to different prisons and are released a few years later with the promise of anonymity—they can choose different names, and new identity papers are given to them in order to start fresh. Both travel to England and almost certainly never make contact—an uncompromising condition of their release.

The ideological conditions could not be more obvious: for the act of killing one's mother, one receives the opportunity to literally and legally become another subject. The relationship between the girls, often described as *folie à deux* (shared psychosis), has been the inspiration for New Zealand theatre productions and avant-garde films. However, to reflect on the act of murdering retroactively makes its own possibilities for understanding New Zealand society both historically and in the present time. Although the crime took place in 1954 and although Pauline and Juliet are now residing abroad, the killing of Honora Parker continues to permeate New Zealand's culture with curiosity and guilt. What is being revealed is that the superego's injunction to *enjoy!* is a contradictory ideological position. Žižek takes an anti-postmodern stance by claiming that ideology has never disappeared; rather, it is hidden within

the Symbolic order and specifically within the structure of language. It is here that Žižek's return to ideology as a contemporary problem becomes crucial. There exists the pressure to fulfill desires that are no longer necessarily forbidden. The promise of desire is ever present through commodity culture and popular culture icons. This is portrayed in *Heavenly Creatures,* when the girls worship Orson Welles, build makeshift shrines to Hollywood stars of the time, and indulge their fantasies to be film stars. The murder serves as the ultimate traumatic connection to this enjoyment and to the subjectivization of the hysterical feminine subject via the original image of desire—the mother.

Ideological Bodies

Žižek posits the postmodern superego injunction to *enjoy!* as contrary to prohibition. By this he means that the authority of the big Other insists that we are subjects of choice, although our freedom is mediated by ideological forces and is, to this extent, illusory. Žižek is claiming that the superego permits enjoyment but does not insist on an obligation to do so. This provides a direct link with desire, which is itself a state of non satisfaction; the superego can then feed on that which is repressed. Myers offers an example of how Žižek posits enjoyment:

> Constantly bombarded with images of, and invitations to indulge in, sexual enjoyment, it cannot longer be claimed that sexual pleasure is in any way prohibited. On the contrary, for Žižek, sensual gratification has been elevated to the status of an official ideology. We are compelled to enjoy sex. This compunction—the injunction to 'Enjoy!'—marks the return of the superego.[4]

The superego injunction to enjoy implicates the body—one ought to enjoy one's body, to enjoy desire and strive toward being desired. The body has a pivotal role in such a striving, which is to assume the ideal image contained within the Real of the body, meaning that which is impossible to capture in the Symbolic. *Heavenly Creatures* plays around with the specter of the body by incorporating fantasy with the Symbolic and the Symbolic with the Real. Specifically, Juliet and Pauline are depicted as queens in fantasy scenes that are interwoven in their daily narratives.

Žižek states that "reality is already ideological" and "ideological is not the 'false consciousness' of a (social) being but this being itself in so far as it is supported by 'false consciousness.'"[5] Ideology has the function of organizing repressed desires and is akin to a film screen where fantasies can be played out under a protective layer. For Žižek, the specter of the Other is repeatedly transmitted through invisible ideologies that are revealed by the speaking subject. This speculative image of the Other is constituted both *by* and *of* the body. What I mean is that the Other, the mirror image of the self, is where the body is constructed for the subject and also how the body is understood. In this

way the body is within the domains of both the Symbolic and the Imaginary. The body is constructed as both desirable and as an ideological "fallout." By this Žižek means that "power inscribes itself into the body directly—bypassing ideology,"[6] and those mechanisms and institutions that yield power seize the individual toward the big Other.

The logic of the imperative to *enjoy!* points to what Žižek describes as a simulated enjoyment: to appear in a certain way (from which other subjects bear witness to your enjoyment) is a more desirable motive than actually experiencing enjoyment. Such simulated enjoyment is portrayed by many of the characters in *Heavenly Creatures.* Power, sex, money, fame, love: all provide ideological signifiers that are articulated as inner convictions and ritualized within a conservative township. The pleasures and functions of the body premise desire only when one recognizes and transcends false consciousness. What the body offers and promises is a way to fulfill desire, insofar as the subject can enjoy the body provided there is a connection with the Other. But at the same time, the subject struggles with such a desire for connection and wants to disconnect from the Other by a radical separation.

The depicted killing of Honora Parker in *Heavenly Creatures* horrifically illustrates this radical tension and separation. Even when the body is dead and the marks of murder are carved, once the girls have given ground to their perverse enjoyment, nothing is resolved as they come to a confronting and traumatic realization that their subjectivity and the body they inhabit do not fit well together. This may explain the curious tenet of the legal system, which insists the girls construct a subjectivity to fit with their bodies, the ones that killed. Here is the Real of trauma, not necessarily the murder and the events leading up to it, but the retroactive recognition of the gap between the desiring subject's body and its imposed subjectivity.

Žižek says of Lacan's theory of subjectivity:

> Lacan does talk about feminine jouissance eluding the Phallic domain, he conceives of it as an ineffable "dark continent" separated from (the male) discourse by a frontier that is impossible to traverse . . . In traditional terms, the Limit that defines woman is not epistemological but ontological—*that is to say, beyond it there is nothing* . . . Woman *qua* Enigma is a specter generated by the inconsistent surface of multiple masks . . . and the Lacanian name for this inconsistency of the surface is simply *the subject.*[7]

The desiring subject wears many masks. It is important to recapitulate that the order of desire is the function of the Other. *Jouissance*, being sexual, does not relate to the Other, whereas desire is always the desire of the Other, "since it is impossible to desire what one already has."[8] According to Evans[9] Lacan understands *jouissance* as sexual enjoyment. Desire is socially constructed while *jouissance* is a subjective experience. Grosz offers that desire is a mark of the unknowable by claiming, "Lacan accords women the possibility of refusing a pleasure and desire that is not theirs, but not of claiming one that *is* theirs."[10]

Desire and its relation to the body has been much explored in film. The classic screen icon, the femme fatale in film noir has been written about in great detail by a variety of psychoanalytically influenced film scholars. Žižek employs analysis of film to further the understanding of changing social conditions, observing how film directly implicates the viewer in a carefully constructed fantasy. Žižek argues that noir is a specific genre that seeks to develop a literacy of desire, love, and *jouissance*. The femme fatale comes into existence because the man constructs desire for and of the woman against an idealized specular image. Lacan's claim, "woman is a symptom of a man,"[11] is a construction of the woman foregrounded as masculine fantasy. For Žižek, this arises within film in two significant ways. The first is that woman is a consequence of the desire of a man and is an ideological support for patriarchy. The second is that woman only exists as a symptom of a man and cannot be fully known[12].

These two positions are crucial in understanding how Pauline and Juliet are portrayed both in the media after their arrest and in *Heavenly Creatures*. The femme fatale belies the construction of the lesbian motif as tantalizing for viewers, and the media gaze sensationalizes the horror of young lovers in order to provide a fantasy contrast with mundane heteronormativity, the dominant discourse of the time. The film both upholds and antagonizes in deliberately understating heteronormativity as a symptom of the male gaze by over-romanticizing ambiguous love scenes. At this juncture ideology accounts for Lacan's proposal: "the only thing one can be guilty [of] is having given ground relative to one's desire."[13] That one has a male or female lover

Figure 11.2   Juliet (Kate Winslet) as Deborah in the fantasmic Fourth World. Still from *Heavenly Creatures* (1994).

ought to be of no consequence to desire. Desire is above the law and irrelevant to the binary of good and evil. For Žižek, desire is already marked by a drive, and it is woman who embodies the death drive.[14] This is highlighted by the sacrificial mother, Honora Parker, who must be eliminated in order for Juliet and Pauline to foreground their desires. However, the important role Honora plays in the conspiracy of the girls' desire goes unnoticed by them. After they have killed her they look on in horror as their cherished desires disintegrate.

Developing a Literacy of Desire

To return to the importance of the sacrificial mother in *Heavenly Creatures,* Tracey, a focus group participant, articulates how the pressure of the superego represses the desire to connect through speech:

> Part of what is intriguing about the film is that people of that era were unable to communicate entirely what they felt. There was this negative thing about homosexuality, whereas these days we would just think it's OK. But that sense of [Pauline's] mother being this person who obviously had her own daughter really young and was unable to communicate her own wants for her daughter. So, she would nag her daughter. I could appreciate both sides.

This image of desire is constructed as a self who has the potential to be articulate to other subjects. However, such an articulation is set against a recognition of Žižek's ideology in that a particular standpoint is already postulated, even if we do not know whether it is the truth. What is crucial here is that inarticulation is posited as a symptom of a specific historical period alongside the idea that such a symptom creates the lived experience as real. As Žižek asserts, ideological conditions are not added to that which already exists, they are within the materiality of everyday life. This includes the conditions from which intimate relationships occur. Tracey importantly highlights the struggle in identifying with the ideal feminine desire and *jouissance* portrayed in the film, with that of the rebellious daughter striving for independence and that of the mother who is fiercely protective and anxious about her daughter's future. Both positions operate in relation to each other, this being depicted in a particularly surreal part of the film where Pauline's inner monologue about the hatred she feels for her mother is voiced over the sound of Honora's angry and frustrated "nagging."

Desire is ideologically signified at a symbolic level by such *points de capiton* as love, power, ambition, money, fame, and material possessions. However, what can also be revealed are the more forbidden desires one might articulate. The perverseness of subjectivity is an ethical function that accords with the superego injunction of modern times as Žižek states:

> [W]e are bombarded from all sides by different versions of the injunction "Enjoy!", from direct enjoyment in sexual performance to enjoyment in professional achievement or spiritual awakening. Enjoyment today effectively functions as a strange ethical duty: individuals feel guilty not for violating moral prohibitions by way of engaging in illicit pleasures, but for not being able to enjoy.[15]

Participants attempted to articulate what they meant by desire and how it impacts their experiences. An interrogation of desire is a way for subjects to take care of the Real via fantasy. What this means is that the function of fantasy can provide an elucidation of what the subject is struggling with or reluctant to grasp. Such interpretations of desire and *jouissance*, for the subject, are not necessarily what has been said; rather, what has been said provides a compass point for what remains unsaid or in the suspension of fantasy.

A different subject is revealed whenever, in acting on desire, one recognizes themselves as a symptom of the Other. What remains in suspension for the subject manifests a question: as Gary, a participant, poses when discussing his sex life, "what is wrong with a bit of spanking sometimes?" Gary is setting the terms of his desire: it is without tense, and no guarantee of satisfaction is given. His articulation that he enjoys a bit of spanking creates a momentum contingent on fantasy that forms a continuum with, and possible literacy of, desire. It provides access to desire through embracing the object that produces *jouissance*, which is the body, posited as a wish fulfillment. Such desire for a better *jouissance* pulls the subject toward the preferred discourse for Žižek, the Master's discourse—the future possible pleasure that is promised is the master signifier (S1), while the anticipation that ensues is the knowledge that satisfaction is imminent. For Žižek, this occurs when the function of the *objet a* is explicitly revealed as the superego injunction to *enjoy!* The perverse act occupies S1. Such is our perversion that we identify with ourselves as the gaze.

How to Kill Your Mother

Symbolic deficiency leaves the contemporary subject seeking their "true" Other, or what Žižek calls the Other of the Other. This is a bypassing of the big Other, which is consequently reduced to the Other or that which is tied to the image of the Other. A way out of this conundrum is for the subject to insist on belief as a way to seek the true Other. However, Žižek finds this rather obvious and no more than a response to a cluster of ideologies surrounding consumerism, commercialism, and the illusion of self-sufficiency. The act, he maintains, promises a way out of this deadlock. He claims:

> The act differs from an active intervention (action) in that it radically transforms its bearer (agent): the act is not simply something I "accomplish"—after an act, I'm literally "not the same as before." In this sense, we could say that the subject

"undergoes" the act ("passes through" it) rather than "accomplishes" it: in it, the subject is annihilated and subsequently reborn (or not), i.e., the act involves a kind of temporary eclipse, *aphanisis*, of the subject.[16]

In *Heavenly Creatures* the act of killing the mother is founded on the demise of the authority of the original big Other, the m(O)ther. The killing symbolizes the illusion of freedom sought by Juliet and Pauline. The prohibition of the big Other, together with desire for the mother, manifest as a form of subjective narcissism. The subject that exists after the act of killing is a different subject, which viewing participants are compelled to imagine. At this juncture a gaze that sees beyond the cinematic screen is implicated through fantasy. We can only imagine this different subject if we imagine killing our own mother or imagine being killed by our own daughter. This act of killing is ironically a way of preserving the dignity of the murdered mother; sacrificing that which is most dear to a subject ensures its imaginary status and thus a subject can be born again.

Of course, Žižek does not bypass a fundamental paradox—it is much easier to imagine the ending of undesirable circumstances than to actually change them. In this way social rituals operate as within an ideology in which repeated gestures give meaning in the form of a narrative. The repeated rituals in which one partakes occur in the guise of naturalized, internalized, and even spontaneous experience from which the subject derives a feeling of illusory freedom to create a conviction of subjective identity. The illusion of freedom highlights a naïve clinging to ideology: the conditions for the killing to occur were already in place. In this way, desire for subjective wholeness can be seen as a specter that is in tension with the Symbolic.

The murder of Honora Parker is for viewers a relief and a horror, as Kim, a young woman states as she tracks the gaze of the mother:

> [Honora] is so sweet and just wanting to take the girls out for a walk. The thing that really gets me is she's so—because I'm not a mother, so I don't know what having a child feels like—hurt by watching her child go crazy. Most youth will go through something like infatuation or an intense friendship. But you can just see it in her eyes; she just wants her daughter to come back.

Heavenly Creatures is about murder as well as gender and class struggle in which notions of freedom or liberation are reduced to mere gestures within ideology. The film highlights both the failure of the upper middle class to uphold the social mores alongside blind acceptance of their logic by the working class. Representations of class-consciousness are apparent in the forms of commodification of desire, of alienating working conditions, and of the necessary retreat into fantasy as ways of attempting to render class struggle invisible.

So how might one successfully kill one's mother? By this I mean, how might one reject sustaining repressive ideologies without abandoning desire? A possibility seems to lie in cultivating a literacy of desire by means of interrogating those ideological systems that give desire and enjoyment traction. This entails submitting fully to fantasy, admitting that there is no big transcendental Other and attempting to dissolve it from subjective structure. Although Pauline Parker and Juliet Hulme have long left New Zealand, a trace of their presence remains. Whereas Pauline has been publicly silent, Juliet has changed her name to Anne Perry to become a best-selling crime novelist. Both the refusal to speak and the need to repeatedly articulate the traumatic through the metaphor of crime novels are moves toward obfuscating the Real. Both are addressed to the Other and are modalities of trauma, which return to the same place. The act of murder confronts the *jouissance* of the body of the Other; the body that is left after the murder is just a corpse as Pauline and Juliet run away, distressed and horrified at the murder they have just committed. They are completely covered in the blood of Pauline's mother and this reveals the all too poignant truth that they have utterly failed to remove the Other (mother) from the field of their subjectivities. All that remains is the *jouissance* of the image of the m(O)ther and the register of the Imaginary becomes everything. The figure of the m(O)ther is a starting and ending signifier of a wasteland of decomposed fantasy devoid of desire. While the mother is dead, she refuses to be killed.

Notes

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3. Slavoj Žižek, E. Wright, and E. Wright, *The Žižek Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 55.
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7. Ibid., 151–152.
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14. Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (London: Granta Books, 2006), 104.
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Dialogue with American Skepticism: Cavell and Žižek on Sexual Difference

By Keiko Ogata

Introduction

The object of this essay is to establish a critical dialogue between Stanley Cavell and Slavoj Žižek in order to explore the theoretical conjunction between skepticism and psychoanalysis. Idiosyncratic as it may seem, it is none other than Cavell himself who prompts this unprecedented scholarly conversation. He states, "philosophy has been fulfilled in the form of psychoanalysis."[1] He comes to this remarkable conclusion through an investigation of the modern manifestation of skepticism. Cavell realizes that his insight, that philosophy is satisfied in psychoanalysis, is best demonstrated through film.[2]

Among other films, Cavell focuses especially on what he calls "Hollywood remarriage comedies" such as *It Happened One Night, The Awful Truth, His Girl Friday, The Lady Eve,* and *The Philadelphia Story* as well as this genre's radical successor, "the melodrama of the unknown woman" (films such as *Gaslight*, and *Letter from an Unknown Woman*) to elaborate a theory of skepticism that leads to his esoteric conclusion: skepticism is inflected by gender, insofar as it is impossible to have any complete knowledge of woman, and it is this feminine enigma that causes skeptical doubt.[3] What this unknowableness implies is the unacceptability of feminine desire.[4]

All these cinematic dramas are, Cavell claims, different versions of Genesis, the Christian creation myth. Given this, ungraspable, unknowable, and unacknowledgeable feminine desire makes the foundation of knowledge problematic and, at the same time, the insistence of these impossibilities is the positive condition of the feminine subject within patriarchal discourse of marriage.

This essay aims to examine Cavell's reflection through Žižek's ontology of sexual difference in order to show that Žižekian theory complementarily explains these seemingly idiosyncratic Cavellian conclusions.

With Hegelian dialectics and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Žižek has revolutionarily established a conjunctive theoretical ground of philosophy and psychoanalysis based on an elaboration of his theory of sexual difference. According to Lacan/Žižek, sexual difference immediately becomes an ontological problem and vice versa. For, as the creation myth generates not an asexual existence but a sexualized subject, the finite speaking subject is always-already sexualized. There is no given, transparent, asexual being to which sexual difference is added historically, or ideologically.[5] Sex is the fundamental enigma for the finite being, the immediate problem of our existence.

According to Lacan/Žižek, sexual difference by no means directly refers to biological sex or self-identity. Further, it is not created on the same epistemological ground. Rather this difference indicates two asymmetrical positions in relation to the phallic function of language: while the masculine completely conforms to the function, the feminine finds no comprehensive law of language through which the feminine subject can be completely known. Thus the man and the woman never constitute a whole or unproblematic oneness. Rather they generate a Möbius-strip-like relationship of incommensurables. Because of this asymmetry, it is impossible to have a harmonious sexual relationship, according to Lacan/Žižek. It is this impossibility, I argue, that manifests itself as the unsuccessful marriage, the unknowablility of woman, and the negation of her desire in Hollywood remarriage comedies and the melodrama of the unknown woman.

Cavell observes that the negation of feminine desire is not found in Hollywood classical comedies in which the father provides an education for his daughter in order to protect her virginity. The daughter/woman's desire is fulfilled in marriage. In contrast, in the remarriage comedies and the melodrama of the unknown woman, the feminine protagonist starts to show her dissatisfaction after she marries, thus demanding knowledge in the form of her interest in education. Cavell writes, the female protagonists "know they need to learn something further about themselves, or rather to undergo some change, or creation, even if no one knows how the knowledge and change are to arrive."[6] What is emphasized is the woman's unsatisfied desire, not the completeness of marriage. She presents her discontent with the hegemonic discourse of marriage and its inability to overcome the deadlock of her desire. It is her negated desire that disturbs the unity of marriage. The image of the unknown woman is, in this sense, the untamable remainder of feminine desire resisting any definite and stable philosophical meaning. As a result of this enigma, the sexual relationship ends up being asymmetrical in terms of knowledge.

Moreover, it is imperative to note that, as Cavell points out, this modern idiosyncratic version of Genesis is born out of a certain inheritance that Hollywood film received from American transcendentalism: the skepticism of

Ralph Waldo Emerson. As an American philosopher, Cavell argues, Emerson proposes a therapeutic, practical answer or solution to the Cartesian skeptical impasse. Instead of remaining in skeptical retreat from thinking itself as Descartes does ultimately, Emerson never abandons his faith in others; he insists upon the presence of the world, other minds, and the unattained self. Through continuing discursive action, Emerson never stops trying to approximate the otherness that evades his intellectual grasp. This is the unfinishable exercise of self-trust, based on the skeptical recognition of the insurmountable difference between self and other. Cavell calls this "Emersonian moral perfectionism," the moral action of a finite being. According to Cavell, it is the feminine subject on the screen who actualizes this perfectionism. Examining this Cavellian claim in the light of Žižekian ontology, this essay aims to push forward a critical dialogue between Cavell and Žižek that will enable us to consider the recondite ontology of sexual difference in a new light.

Negation of Marriage and the Advent of the Unknown Woman

When Cavell investigates the modern manifestation of skepticism, he makes the theoretical presupposition that if skepticism doubts the ordinary in its familiarity and stability, so, too, must the manifestation of doubt be found in the familiar and stable. He then defines marriage as the ultimate experience of other minds, for within this ordinary, everyday relationship, the skeptical problem emerges in full splendor. That is, one of the most familiar and common forms of relationship turns out to be an unfamiliar and uncanny experience of otherness and thus a persistent encounter with the problem of skepticism. Cavell stresses that this issue of knowledge's foundation is elaborated on the screen as the problem of the feminine subject who ends up being out of reach of male knowledge. Thus conversations in marriage become contentious and never arrive at harmonious conclusions. Disregarding the evidence of some ill-defined incompleteness of feminine subjectivity, Cavell insists that is the patriarchal discourse of marriage that is found to be wanting in these films. Hollywood becomes in his analysis less a machine for the formation of couples than an interpretive machine that exposes coupling's failures.

The negation of feminine desire is highly problematic in the light of Emersonian/Cavellian skepticism. For Emerson/Cavell, the experience and proof of our existence is always mediated by knowledge that comes to us from the Other (which is in fact the thesis of Lacan's mirror phase essay). In order to overcome skepticism, Cavell claims, Emerson looks to other minds for help; we gain knowledge of others by knowing what they know. It is only through this process that we can acknowledge the existence both of other minds and of our own. Indeed, Cavell writes, "wanting to know another's existence by knowing what the other knows is evidently a route for knowing whether your own existence is known, say acknowledgeable."[7] Thus, if the woman's desire for knowledge is disregarded in marriage, what is, in fact, denied is not only

the woman's proof of the existence but also any possibility of constituting a relationship between the man and the woman. It is marriage itself that refuses to acknowledge something unknown, ungraspable, and yet undeniable in the form of feminine desire.

The point is, however, that this negation, "the radical unacceptability of the woman's desire" in Cavellian terms, is also the *positive* condition of the feminine subject. Even though it may sound paradoxical, it is this negation, or lack that constitutes the feminine subject. It is not through recognition but through an acceptance of her unknowability that the feminine subject emerges. This lack functions not just as an obstacle to be removed, but as a positive condition of her identity. Cavell's insight is strikingly parallel to Žižek's theory of sexual difference.

Žižek elaborates his theory based on Lacanian psychoanalysis. According to Lacan/Žižek, the human being is always-already a sexualized subject. This inseparability of sexuation and existence makes the foundation of knowledge problematic. For, as mentioned, it is the lack of knowledge, the unknowability of the woman that permits her independent existence. She is manifest as a symptom, an inexplicable contradictory presence in the Symbolic. This lack distinguishes the feminine from the masculine subject: the masculine can be known through the comprehensive phallic function of language because the masculine subject completely conforms to this totalizing function. On the contrary, however, there is no such comprehension (neither in the sense of *understanding*, nor in the sense of *containing*) of the feminine subject. Thus the male and the female constitute not a harmonious oneness but rather asymmetrical positions in relation to the phallic function of language. The resulting (un)relationship has a Möbius-strip-like structure in which the male and the female never form the totality of a yin-yang-like oneness.

In order to illustrate the recondite structural difference between the masculine and the feminine, let me refer to the difference found in the number system. The difference between the masculine and the feminine subject is structurally the same as the one between natural numbers and irrational numbers. While the former are expressed as 1, 2, 3, and so on, the latter are described in symbols such as π (3.141592 . . .), φ (1.618033 . . .), or $\sqrt{2}$ (1.41421 . . .). Even though both types of numbers can be found along the number line, the natural and the irrational numbers are respectively generated out of on different logics. The logic of the former, however, is also the logic of the phallic function of language.

Any natural number can be created in the same manner, by adding 1 to its predecessor: 1's successor, 2, is attained by adding 1 to its predecessor, 1. Likewise, 2's successor, 3, is also attained by adding 1 to the predecessor, 2. Therefore, the sequence of natural numbers is predictable. The rule "adding 1 to its predecessor" is exactly the embodiment of the phallic function of language. It is this law that creates natural numbers. In other words, natural numbers are logically similar to the series composed by men.

Irrational numbers, however, have no common rule, law, or logic by which they attain their identity. For example, while π conforms to the law,

$$\pi = \frac{c}{d},$$

to attain its identity as π, it is only π that conforms to this particular logic. Even though φ is also one of the irrational numbers, it does not follow the same law as π. It is the rule

$$\varphi = \frac{1 + \sqrt{5}}{2}$$

that creates φ. Even though π, φ, and $\sqrt{2}$ are all irrational numbers, there is no common denominator, or common law, that comprehensively describes all the irrational numbers. Each irrational number conforms only to its own constitutive logic. This multiplicity or lack of a comprehensive law marks the structural similarity between irrational numbers and the "not-all" of the feminine subject that refuses to conform to the unifying phallic function of language. These asymmetrical positions in relation to the law are what constitute the logic of Lacanian sexuation.

Žižek describes this "not-all" characteristic of the feminine subject, as an "open ontology"[8] since, as he claims, "woman is an 'unfinished' project" who cannot be "all told."[9] This ontology of the "not all" is what Lacan conveys in the statement: "There is no such thing as The woman," which is frequently translated, "The woman does not exist."[10] While the masculine subject can be comprehensively known through the common law, there is no such law for the feminine subjects through which all women can be known and acknowledged.

I argue that it is this feminine ontology of "not all" and the asymmetry of sexual difference that Cavell recognizes as the cause of skepticism. As I have demonstrated, the Lacanian/Žižekian logic of sexuation does *not* rely on the existence of a common epistemological ground such that a man and a woman would be structured in the same manner and thus knowable to each other. Rather, from the masculine side, the feminine is the undeniable and yet unknowable other, undermining the totalizing assumption of the phallic function of the language that comprehensively generates the masculine. In this sense, the feminine subject disrupts the masculine dream of a complete series of numbers. Cavell designates this asymmetry of sexuation the cause of skepticism. He states, "I might say, traumatically, the possibility that philosophical skepticism is inflected, if not altogether determined, by gender, by whether one sets oneself aside as masculine or feminine. And if philosophical skepticism is thus inflected then, according to me, philosophy as such will be."[11] Although he uses the term "gender" for that which punctuates skepticism, it is rather the asymmetry of sexual difference (as understood by the Lacanian/Žižekian logic of sexuation) that Cavell views as the cause of skepticism as he defines it.

Cavell's insight acts as a philosophical reply to Žižek's following statement about sexuation and causality.

> The problematic of the "social construction of gender" presupposes the subject as given, presupposes the space of contingent symbolization, while, for Lacan, "sexuation" is the price to be paid for the very constitution of the subject, for its entry into the space of symbolization. Therein lies the crucial difference between psychoanalysis and philosophy concerning the status of sexual difference: for philosophy, the subject is not inherently sexualized, sexualization only occurs at the contingent, empirical level, whereas psychoanalysis raises sexuation into a kind of formal *a priori* condition for the very emergence of the subject. We should thus defend the claim that what philosophy cannot think is sexual difference *in its philosophical (ontological) dimension*: sexual difference stands for the primordial antagonism, for the non-All that subverts any totality, and this is what philosophy, up to Heidegger, has to ignore.[12]

Here, Žižek points out that philosophical ontology disregards the psychoanalytic insight that the subject is always-already sexualized; thus ontology and sexuation are inseparable. Yet, despite this point of disagreement, Cavell implicitly offers an argument that runs parallel to Žižek's. Through his philosophical investigation, Cavell also arrives at a conclusion similar to that of Lacan/Žižek. It is this unacknowledgable feminine enigma that structures the feminine subject. What the unknown woman on the screen insists is this paradoxical condition of feminine existence, her ungraspable and yet undeniable presence. Cavell wisely remarks, "film is the medium of visible absence."[13] Thus, Hollywood film is able to present the contradictory Lacanian "~~The~~ woman." Greta Garbo is, according to Cavell, "the most fascinating cinematic image on film of the unknown woman."[14] As a modern medium of philosophy, film not only reflects upon the problem of other minds, but also provides the absolute Lacanian image of "~~The~~ woman" who emerges as the paradoxical index of lack creating skeptical doubt.

Metamorphosis from Fetish to Symptom

According to Cavell, Hollywood movies have inherited not only the burden of skepticism but also Ralph Waldo Emerson's version of it, and it is the woman on the screen who actualizes that burden. Examining this claim once again in light of the Žižekian ontology, I want to explore the way in which the feminine subject actualizes Emersonian moral perfectionism by insisting on her incomplete desire within the dominant discourse of marriage. Cavell points out that transformation takes place as a result of the woman's attestation of her own desire. This transformation or metamorphosis, I argue, is from a fetish into a symptom. The point is that the American, positive version of skepticism is what makes this feminine conversion possible.

Cavell argues that Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, the representative figures of the American version of romanticism known as transcendentalism, are not so much romantic writers or essayists who assume the totality of knowledge, but skeptical philosophers who acknowledge the existence of an

unknowable otherness.[15] Cavell calls them the American inheritors of Cartesian skepticism. What distinguishes the Emersonian from the Cartesian self is the fact that while the latter takes solitary, heroic thought as the foundation of knowledge; the former never abandons his faith in thinking's relation to other minds nor to thought's otherness to itself. Witness, for example, Thoreau's following statement of wonder, "Why do precisely these objects which we behold make a world?"[16] Emerson and Thoreau never disregard their wonder. Based on this, Emerson persists in wanting to know what others know even though he also traumatically recognizes the insurmountable rupture between self and other. Continuously extending his reliance outward, the Emersonian self embodies a therapeutic action to acquire knowledge of the unknown. Thus Cavell calls the stationary Cartesian self "property," and its inheritor, the dynamic Emersonian self, "a continuing task" or "becoming." It is the latter's movement that enables us to overcome the skeptical impasse.[17]

Cavell argues that this unfinishable task is only ever a moral practice. In this process, "the goal, or the product . . . is not a state of being but a moment of change, say of becoming—a transience of being, a being of transience,"[18] that enables us to approximate the unknown otherness, deal with skepticism, and attain some relation to the not yet attained self. It is this continuing exercise of self-reliance that Cavell calls Emersonian moral perfectionism.[19] Contradictory as it may seem, it is both the skeptical recognition of the ungraspable and undeniable presence of otherness that allows for the simultaneous effort to know what the other knows, the therapeutic action called for by transcendentalism.

Now it is obvious that the Emersonian self as "becoming" is a movement between an already-attained self and a not-yet-attained one, translated as the difference between already attained knowledge and that which is not yet attained. At this point, what I want to emphasize is that the latter is a negativity, a lack, or an absence within (rather than beyond the boundaries of) the former. Thus this mode of existence can be considered as the dialectical and temporal movement between the present and the future. Once provided with this definition, we see how this mode of being is structurally parallel with the Žižekian subject in its dialectical movement. Relying on Hegelian dialectics, Žižek convincingly argues that negativity, the lack, or the limit of the foundation of knowledge is the inherent component of human finitude. Through the dialectical movement, this negativity turns into a positive condition of human existence. It is this movement between the attained and unattained self that enhances what Cavell calls the "metamorphosis" of the feminine subject.

As I have demonstrated already, the feminine enigma creates problems with the foundation of knowledge while the tension between the unknowable woman and the male subject is dramatized in an antagonistic, disharmonious marriage. This disharmony is the outcome of the refusal to acknowledge the woman's desire. As the marriage transforms from a father-daughter-like relationship into a mature, sexual one between a man and a woman who wants to know what she doesn't know, what is revealed is the antagonistic discord

at the heart of the marital couple. In this process, Cavell argues, a woman's metamorphosis moves her from a conforming daughter-like figure to a woman with her own desire. This movement is nothing but the trajectory of the Emersonian self's becoming. This conversion structures the modern narrative of the creation myth as a dialectical movement that transforms the feminine from a fetish to a symptom.

Fetish and symptom are opposed concepts in terms of language's phallic function. While the fetish serves to sustain the totality of the function, the symptom embodies the rupture of that totality and the revelation of its falsity. The daughter-like woman in the classic comedies plays the role of fetish that props up and sustains the fantasy that marriage resolves all problems and is the ultimate form of happiness available to women. On the one hand, the woman who recognizes her discontent with marriage and follows her desire resists this traditional role and becomes instead a symptom that perturbs the harmony of marriage. Žižek writes, "the symptom is the exception [that] disturbs the surface of the false appearance, the point at which the repressed Other scene erupts, while the fetish is the embodiment of the Lie [that] enables us to sustain the unbearable truth."[20] Given that women block truth,[21] and at the same time, the woman is "a symptom of a man,"[22] we can conclude that fetish and symptom are different manifestations of the feminine subject in the Symbolic. This contradiction stems from the open-ontology of the feminine subject. A woman can be a fetish and a symptom. In fact, Žižek admits, "the fetish is effectively a kind of symptom in reverse." [23] Let us illustrate this fetish-to-symptom transformation as it takes place in *Gaslight, an* uncanny, female Gothic film.

The film's heroine, Paula (Ingrid Bergman) is deprived of her own self-trust by her authoritative father-like husband and forced to assume the handmaiden role of keeper-of-the-lie by participating cheerfully in a sham marriage. The film opens when her aunt, Alice, a famous singer, is murdered in her home. The murderer is looking for something there but fails to find it. Alice had raised her niece, Paula, after the death of Paula's mother. Paula goes to Italy to study opera under Alice's teacher and meanwhile grows into a beautiful young woman. She meets Gregory (Charles Boyer), falls in love, and marries him post haste. Despite her reluctance, Gregory insists on returning to London to live in Alice's house, which has been vacant since her death. Upon their return to the ancestral home, he places Alice's belongings in the attic in order to forestall Paula's anxiety.

A series of bizarre events follow: Paula loses a broach she has placed in her bag; a painting disappears from the wall and Gregory finds it. Objects continually go missing, gradually ruining Paula's confidence in her sanity. Gregory implies that Paula is unconsciously responsible for these missing items, and it is always he who fills the gap in Paula's knowledge by finding the missing objects. She is almost convinced that he knows more about her than she does. Paula and Gregory's relationship devolves into an asymmetrical master-slave relationship in terms of knowledge. Paula becomes more and more enclosed

in the domestic space as her husband becomes more paternal. It is noteworthy that this enclosure capture is a violent manifestation of the fantasy of the sexual relationship in which a man and a woman mutually form a (false) harmonious relationship. Their union, like the space, becomes suffocating. Opposing this totalizing assumption of sexual difference, Lacan/Žižek argues that such a harmonious sexual relationship is but a fantasy based on the exclusion of feminine desire.

Eventually, it turns out that all the inexplicable events were manipulated by Gregory, who had tried to convince Paula that she had forgotten, hidden, or stolen the missing objects because she was losing her mind. Finally a detective, one of Alice's admirers, saves Paula by revealing Gregory's true identity: not only is he the murderer, he is also a married man. The gap in her knowledge ends up being a fabrication by Gregory. Thus Paula declares in the end, "from the beginning, there was nothing."

At this moment, what Paula retroactively confronts is the meaningless abyssal fact that her marriage was a complete sham. Her identity as a wife collapses when her husband turns out to be a symbolic void, or ghostly substance. Through this traumatic fact, what is really negated, Cavell claims, is the fantasy of marriage as an untroubled meeting of minds. The negation of the fantasy, however, is necessary to the constitution of the female subject herself, for the fantasy was built on the destruction—or attempted destruction—of her mind, on the attempt to convince her that her thinking was impaired.

At the same time, the visual presence of Paula's madness on screen, the theatricalization of a feminine madness within the domestic space, an opaque stain in an otherwise legible, familiar space, seems positively to mark the ungraspability of feminine desire. Remarkably Cavell claims that this enactment of the mad woman is "still creation, or what I might say metamorphosis—some radical, astonishing, one may say melodramatic change of the woman, say of her identity."[24] That is, Paula emerges in the space not as a fully lit, fully legible figure, but as this very illegibility, this mad symptom.

If Paula herself attains some visual truth in the film by participating in a sham marriage, does this not go to show that truth itself has no independent, separate existence but rather imbeds itself in the borrowed reality of the lie? That is: if her marriage is a lie, it is not because there is such a thing as a true marriage in which minds meet, recognize each other for what or who they are, and cohabitate harmoniously. We might cite here Joan Riviere's bold conclusion, which Lacan is quick to adopt; namely that womanliness *is* masquerade. This does not mean that she hides her true nature through masquerade, but that she pretends to hide a truth behind her disguises. It is not simply that there is no truth to womanliness, rather: the truth of womanliness is to be found in disguise.

The thesis of Riviere/Lacan avoids the terminal moraine of skepticism just as assuredly as do Emerson and Thoreau, and perhaps the film *Gaslight* and the question of marriage begin to reveal how the two paths of avoiding the

skeptical disaster link up. Marriage can never be a meeting of minds for as Lacan says, "There is no sexual relation;" between a man and a woman, or one subject and another, there are only missed encounters. If Lacan offers this thesis without any sense of resignation or defeat it is because he takes these inevitable misfires as opportunities to forge a working arrangement, a way of prolonging a life together by filling it with pleasurable surprises. A strong marriage finds ways to mobilize missed encounters into occasions for conversation and transformation or (to put it in Emersonian terms, if we may) places such misfirings in the service of continuing action, "perfectionism," in the specific moral sense.

This final knowledge Paula acquires acts as a reply to the ongoing debate about realism and belief in cinema.[25] Rex Butler, for example, also claims that it is only through fiction, the lie, or the performance that we can approximate reality. Cavell himself explicitly claims, "it is through fantasy that our conviction of reality is established."[26] It is this insight into reality that Paula discovers in the end. Moreover, it echoes Žižek's insight: "If our social reality itself is sustained by symbolic fiction or fantasy, then the ultimate achievement of film art is not to recreate reality within the narrative fiction, to seduce us into (mis)taking a fiction for reality, but, on the contrary, to experience reality itself as a fiction."[27] Through her metamorphosis from a fetish to a symptom, what Paula finally discovers is this truth of reality, which is, as Cavell claims, a constitutive knowledge for the feminine subject. Given this, as Cavell states, if woman actualizes Emersonian moral perfectionism, it is this radical and dialectical movement between the traumatic Real and the Symbolic and this subsequently acquired knowledge that accomplishes the moral perfectionism.

In continuously traversing the hegemonic signifying system in the form of fetish or symptom, the feminine subject finally acquires an understanding of reality. This knowledge is attained though a kind of Emersonian continuing action. As Cavell claims, "Emersonian perfectionism is not primarily a claim as to the right to goods . . . but primarily as to the claim, or the good, of freedom."[28] In this light, it also resembles the structure of Lacanian ethics. Different from traditional ethics—Aristotelian and Utilitarian, both of which are concerned with public life, the good, and happiness—Lacanian ethics serves neither the maximization of public good nor the maximization of utility. As the agent of Emersonian moral perfectionism, the feminine subject seeks rather to destabilize the self-assured maxims of every attempt to "maximize," to create a general rule and attends carefully to the small fissures, the breaks, cracks, and non-encounters that hold the possibility of transformation.

Notes

1. Stanley Cavell, *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), 26.

2. In his first book on film, *The World Viewed*, Cavell claims its inherent self-reflectivity as a modern philosophical medium. Lisa Trahair, using Godard, argues for philosophical possibility of film.

3. In *The World Viewed*, Cavell calls film's mode of reflection, "automatism."

4. Cavell retroactively finds the unknown woman's predecessors in *Genesis*, Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* and *Othello*, and Ibsen's *A Doll's House* to name a few.

5. In "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason" (*Read My Desire*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), comparatively examining the logic of Lacanian sexuation with Kantian antinomy, Joan Copjec remarkably demonstrates that sex is ungraspable through language. It is by no means a culturally constructed object to be added to bare existence or deconstructed retroactively as the historicist assumes. Sex is the fundamental enigma, undeniable and yet unknowable through language because it emerges at the failure of the complete linguistic description. Thus, Copjec states that "sex is the structural incompleteness of language, not that sex itself is incomplete" (p. 206). Her other essay, "The Sexual Compact," also clearly examines this esoteric theory of Lacanian sexuation in a brilliant manner.

6. Stanley Cavell, *Pursuit of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriag* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 56.

7. Cavell, *Contesting,* 20.

8. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012), 741.

9. Ibid., 751.

10. Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limit of Love and Knowledge, Book XX, Encore 1972–1973* (New York: Norton, 1975), 72.

11. Cavell, *Contesting*, 100.

12. Žižek, *Less Than,* 747.

13. Cavell, *Contesting*, 109.

14. Ibid., 106.

15. Cavell's Emersonian skepticism is different from the traditional scholarship of Emerson and Thoreau in its denial of the totalizing assumption of knowledge. As the dominant interpretation of Emerson's "transcendental eyeball" indicates, Emerson and Thoreau are considered to be the owners of the romantic assumption in which we see everything in the world, therefore we know the entire world as a transparent eyeball. Emerson and Thoreau are generally considered not so much American philosophers of skepticism, as American writers of romanticism, called transcendentalism in American literary history.

16. Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971). Cavell quotes this statement as the epilogue of his first book on film, *The World Viewed*.

17. Stanley Cavell, "Being Odd, Getting Even" in *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe,* eds. Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), 9.

18. Ibid.

19. It is not the purpose of this essay to study Emersonian/Cavellian skepticism in comparison with Deleuze's reflection of the cinematic image and the idea of becoming in its ethical assumption. But let me at least point out that even though Cavell and Deleuze are considered to be different in their attitude toward the dilemma of skepticism, structurally speaking, Cavell and Deleuze share the open ontology of

incompleteness. As D. N. Rodowick points out, Deleuzian ontology is more "traumatic." It is not this Emersonian belief that constitutes Deleuze's ontology. Rather it is Nietzsche's nihilistic eternal return that provides the ethical mode of existence for Deleuze.

20. Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001), 13.

21. Žižek, *Less Than,* 750.

22. Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 120.

23. Žižek, *Belief,* 13.

24. Cavell, *Contesting,* 6.

25. A recent issue of *Angelaki*, published in December, 2012 is devoted to this topic.

26. Cavell, *The World,* 85.

27. Slavoj Žižek, *Fright of Real Tears*: *Krzysztof Keslowski between Theory and Post-Theory* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 77.

28. Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Moral Perfectionism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), 26.

From Interpassive to Interactive Cinema: A Genealogy of the Moving Image of Cynicism

By Tamas Nagypal

Introduction: The Interactivities of Cinema

In his book, *The Virtual Life of Film* (2007), D. N. Rodowick is reluctant to accept Lev Manovich's celebration of digital media for supposedly providing new freedoms to interact with the world through creating, controlling, and manipulating data. Taking his cue from Stanley Cavell, Rodowick claims that the true desire of the modern subject is not to achieve such mastery but its exact opposite: to reach the stillness of her psychic apparatus, to see a world that she is absent from, a world that is not her creation.[1] Cavell's argument turns around the old young-Hegelian narrative about the modern subject's alienation from her productive essence, embodied externally as a deceiving mirror image in various ideological institutions, a phantasmagoria she misrecognizes as the natural state of things. In film studies, this argument was popular with Screen theorists who claimed that the spectator-voyeur mistakes the projections of the cinematic apparatus for the images of a complete and self-sufficient world, falling into an ideological slumber much like the slaves in Plato's allegorical cave of illusions. In order to awaken from such a passive state, so their story goes, the subject needs to disidentify from the machine and actively, productively reappropriate what has been taken from her, lifting the veil of ignorance that blocked her access to the real as always already mediated, constructed by the spectator's perspective.[2]

Like Screen theorists, Cavell also thinks that the modern subject is isolated from the real world; he claims, however, that she dwells in such a state

of skepticism precisely *because* of her overbearing suspicion about the world's constructedness, because of the "impression that all we can know of the world is that we have perceptions of it."[3] That is to say, for Cavell, skepticism is paradoxically not the symptom of alienation, but rather of our inability to reach alienation proper. As Rodowick puts it, after the death of God and the disenchantment of the modern universe, with the loss of a guiding tradition we are not so much free but forced to constantly reinvent ourselves and reshape the world to our likeness. Under these circumstances, alienated social practices, customs, and habits—including those of genres and artistic conventions which Cavell calls automatisms—limit the subject's creative agency, preventing her mental fatigue.[4] The medium of film, precisely by providing *automated* projections of the world, liberates us from the burden of creation:

> How do movies reproduce the world magically? Not by literally presenting us with the world, but by permitting us to view it unseen. This is not a wish for power over creation (as Pygmalion's was), but a wish not to need power, not to have to bear its burdens. It is, in this sense, the reverse of the myth of Faust.[5]

As a "machine of metaphysics," film realizes the dream modern philosophy since Kant thought was impossible: to reach the world *in-itself*, a world not tempered with by human agency.[6]

Rodowick's opposition of Cavell and Manovich helps to delineate a crucial inconsistency, a gap between two aspects of our contemporary notion of interactivity. While both authors talk about an exchange, and in this sense interaction, with a cinematic medium (analog and digital, respectively), in the case of Cavell, it is film that is active *for* us, instead of us, so that in return we can enjoy a certain passivity and stillness; whereas Manovich proposes the exact opposite, the possibility of a new activity of the subject with the help of new media's "passive," automated assistance.[7] This conceptual split is reproduced also in contemporary Lacanian theory. Slavoj Žižek, for one, defines interactivity as "being active through another subject who does the job for one."[8] Such exchange, he argues, is constitutive of the social-symbolic order as such where "a signifier is precisely an object-thing [that] substitutes for me, acts in my place;"[9] thus Žižek could say with Cavell that film is the interactive medium *par excellence* whereby our creative agency is objectively embodied in the *autopoiesis* of cinema's "imaginary signifier."[10] By contrast, Robert Pfaller argues that "in the case of interactivity, some activity is being transferred from the producer or from the product to the consumer."[11] His formulation of interactivity as a shift away from mediating apparatuses is in line with Manovich's theorization of the cinema's digital turn as one "from the externalization of the psyche to the implantation of technology," suggesting that while "we used to flock to movie houses where our mental mechanisms were projected on a huge screen. Soon each of us will be able to put back this screen inside her or his head."[12] The immersiveness of the digital thus can be seen as an aspect of its

interactivity whereby it offers us the chance to take back the activity of world creation from the automatized mechanisms of industrial-bureaucratic modernity such as the predigital cinematic apparatus.

The aim of this essay is not to eliminate the contradictions from the concept of interactivity but to demonstrate its irreducible inconsistency which allows using it as a critical tool in the mapping of old and new cinematic media, exploring the particular ways in which they articulate or cover up this gap. I argue that the primary ideological mechanism mobilized to resolve the tension within interactivity is fetishism whereby the subject who suffers from a split (both active and passive) relationship to a medium externalizes her very inconsistency onto a fetish object. This exchange can be called interpassive, and it serves as the ideological support to supposedly active subject positions. On the other hand, I suggest that cinematic interpassivity has a more subversive, nonfetishistic dimension insofar as it can confront subjects with their own fundamental passivity through redoubling it, screening it in front of them. This anxiety producing potential of interpassivity, however, is disappearing as contemporary forms of digital fetishism turn interactive, supplementing a symbolic order that has no space for the former passivity of the distanced observer.

From Interactivity to Fetishism

If we follow Manovich, we could conclude that the difference between the Žižekian and Pfallerian notions of interactivity marks a historical shift from a passive toward a more active cinematic subjectivity paralleling the shift from analog to digital, from modern to postmodern, from representation to participation, and so on. What such simple historicization would miss, however, is the simultaneous co-presence of activity and passivity in the subject of interactive situations, something that was already noted by Friedrich Nietzsche in his critique of the popular young-Hegelian writer David Friedrich Strauss.

Strauss proposed as a cultural program for the German nation in the mid-nineteenth century to follow the footsteps of classical authors and artists like Goethe and Beethoven by copying their moves, perfecting their techniques: by turning into their epigone.[13] In Cavellian-Žižekian terms, being an epigone should be read as the interactive reliance on automatisms produced by various author-signifiers of the past, Strauss's "subjects supposed to know" who allow for an artistic comfort so despised by Nietzsche, *the* philosopher of the "burden of creation" if there ever was one.

Furthermore, Nietzsche recognizes a certain excess in Strauss's compliance to the classics' automatisms when his confession of reverence turns into an autonomous activity, when he starts making up rules for how to become a proper fan instead of focusing on the steps necessary to reproduce great works. Strauss envisions a new faith based on the community of philistine believers who are all enthusiasts of the classics.[14] Decoding the message he sends to his

fellow believers, Nietzsche identifies a reversal of causality in Strauss's relation to the masters: creativity is now on the side of the fans, the value of the classics is dependent on the community's enthusiastic appraisal.

This is the point when Strauss's Cavellian interactivity is turned upside down in the sense that the formerly passive subject position of the believer is now reframed as the only *correct* form of activity. In Nietzsche's terms, this reversal echoes precisely what he later identifies as the emergence of morality.[15] To paraphrase, we might say that the initial duality of good (great) classics and bad (humble) epigones is overwritten by Strauss with the binary of good (proper) epigones and "evil" (improper, faulty) classics who are resented now precisely for what they used to be praised for. In order for Strauss to reappropriate his formerly externalized productive essence from the classics, he first has to devalue his own earlier reverence of them; he has to denigrate them right after he praised them, relying on them for doing the hard work, but at the same time ridiculing them for doing just that, identifying their interactive burden as a sign of weakness and vulnerability: "He [Strauss] . . . slides his burden along playfully and with a light heart, whereas Beethoven rolls his painfully and breathlessly."[16]

Curiously we can find a similar maneuver in Cavell while talking about the "moral of film's image":

> In screening reality, film screens its givenness from us; it holds reality from us, it holds reality before us, i.e., withholds reality before us. We are tantalized at once by our subjection to it and by its subjection to our views of it. But while reality is the bearer of our intentions it is possible . . . to refuse to allow it to dictate what shall be said about it.[17]

It seems that the Cavellian-Straussian interactivity of the medium, far from simply condemning the subject to a state of passive, *voyeuristic* observation from a distance, in fact opens up a space of a secondary interactivity precisely as a re-action to the medium's being preoccupied with the task of creation, whereby the subject *exhibits* herself, puts *herself* on display in a process of re-creation standing in the blind spots of the Other's shadow, so to speak, resisting its supposed knowledge while at the same time *believing* in it working in the background (as Nietzsche points out, Strauss fancies himself as an epigone who is better than his masters because he can correct the mistakes, fill in the gaps that they didn't notice).[18] To put it differently, interactivity is neither the letting of the big Other to act in our stead, nor simply the reappropriation of some activity previously taken from us; rather it is both at the same time, signaling the fundamental split of the modern subject caught in the symbolic order.

This dialectic between two types of interactivity, however, is not the end of Strauss's story. According to Nietzsche, he takes one step further and leaves the communitarian field of moral automatisms behind when he finally posits himself, the epigone, as the one and only true genius. In his private fantasy, instead of collectively revering the classical masters, the group of enthusiasts becomes

now his follower along with the classics themselves.[19] In psychoanalytic terms, Strauss opts for a *fetishistic* solution to overcome the interactive split of his subjectivity forced on him by the classic-signifiers: he disavows the very belief he has built his community on, separating himself from the masses who start to function, along with the classics themselves, as fetishes, subjects who are supposed to believe (rather than know) for him, instead of him.[20]

This final move cannot be understood anymore within the frameworks of interactivity; it is neither about the voyeuristic externalization of an activity, nor about the exhibitionist reappropriation of one. It is rather the dialectical *Aufhebung* (sublation) of the two aspects of interactivity as it involves the externalization of the subject's passivity (in this case that of his belief) on the Other—a procedure that both Pfaller and Žižek call interpassivity.[21] It is easy to see how such a practice goes against the Cavellian (interactive) understanding of cinema. If we can simply externalize our conviction in the reality of film's automated world projections on the Other, we fall back into the state of skepticism that cinema was supposed to cure us from. The question is, then, whether the film spectator is just another incarnation of a Straussian fetishistic interpassivity or, as Cavell would like to have it, film has the potential to move us beyond skepticism precisely by embracing the fundamentally passive part of our subjectivity brought forward by the automated views of the world?

Fetishism and the Interpassivity of Film

Unlike Cavell, classical psychoanalytic film theory has a more Straussian explanation for the reality effect that cinema produces in its spectator. According to Christian Metz, the film viewer has a fetishistic relation to the projections on the screen, allowing her both to acknowledge and simultaneously to disavow its lacking, merely illusory nature and enjoy the film *as if* it was real. To put it differently, cinematic fetishism opens up a gap between the spectator's public and private approach toward film, similar to Strauss's split relation to the classics. While publicly she pretends with the crowd in the theater to believe in its reality, privately, however, she would deny to have fallen for its trick. Crucially, as Metz points out following Octave Mannoni, this fetishistic split of having it both ways is sustainable only by relying on the fiction of a naïve, "credulous observer," who, unlike the fetishist, is supposedly deceived by the spectacle because she is unable to maintain a proper distance toward it.[22] In case of Strauss, the interpassive externalization of belief on such a fetish resolved his oscillation between two contradictory aspects of interactivity, his voyeurism and his exhibitionism *of the Other's knowledge.* By contrast, Metz argues that reliance on the fetish doesn't so much eliminate this subjective split as it translates voyeurism into naïve belief, formulating it as the *lack* of its opposite, the exhibition of *having* an enlightened knowledge.

Nonetheless, I suggest following Joan Copjec, we should avoid identifying the film fetishist as a subject who can have it both ways in her relation to the

big Other: have a naïve belief in the fullness of film's illusion and at the same time secretly experience an obscene enjoyment while detecting its failures and lacks. Such a split, Copjec argues, characterizes the standard neurotic subject, whom I have described as being caught in the dialectic of interactivity. The fetishist-pervert is, on the contrary, the one who avoids this very subjective split by externalizing it on the fetish.[23] In Nietzsche's account, Strauss only takes a fetishist position proper when he produces a short circuit between the classics and his community of believers, taking himself out of the equation by occupying the position of knowledge about the Other's desire. Formerly, as an interactive subject he was split in regard to what the big Other (the classics) wanted from him, which he articulated as the contradictory injunction to revere them for their perfection and critique them for not living up to their own standards. As a fetishist, however, Strauss has managed to eliminate this gap in his relationship to the Other by transferring it onto the fetish object: he short circuited the lack in the big Other, and the lack in the small other (his fellow human being as naïve believer), into the figure of the classic-epigone caught in self-belief, while positioning himself as non-lacking and thus all knowing. This way, he could retroactively turn his former voyeuristic performance of belief into a mere "as if" behind which there is the knowledge he has been exhibiting all along.

This is how the "knowledge value" of the fetish that Metz talks about can be understood. The fetishistic disavowal of the Other's lack does not mean that the pervert somehow clings to his belief in the perfection of the classics, in the reality of the cinematic illusion, or in the maternal phallus, etc.[24] It is not the fetishist who doesn't know about the lack (i.e. the desire) of the Other but the Other itself, and its lack of knowledge about itself is captured precisely in the fetish object. This is also how Žižek reads Octave Mannoni's famous formula of fetishistic disavowal, "I know very well, but all the same . . ."; to paraphrase the often-repeated punch line of his joke about the man who imagined himself to be a grain of seed and was afraid that a chicken would eat him, a film fetishist could say, "I know very well the moving images on the screen are not real, but does the cinematic apparatus know?"[25] This way Cavell's magical device of interactive world projections is transformed into an interpassive fetish object for the disenchanted to take pity on.

It would be misleading to claim, however, that the fetishist is not "duped" at all by the creative automatisms of film; as Žižek emphasizes, the only subject who is not deceived at all by the symbolic order is the psychotic, who cannot but see the automatisms of the big Other as hallucinatory intrusions into her psyche.[26] For the psychotic, the efficiency of the symbolic, or its lack, is foreclosed; she is both entirely separated from the big Other and fully immersed in it. She doesn't simply *believe* in external (symbolic) reality; rather she cannot but have a paranoid *conviction* that some really existing hidden agency is controlling her mind through the symbolic institutions. The psychotic's paranoid conviction should thus be opposed to the pervert's fetishistic knowledge; while

in psychotic hallucinations it is the Other that materializes as the agency of absolute knowledge, in perversion, it is the subject who stands in the place of such knowledge "in the real." Moreover, it is also clear why Cavell's skeptic is a pervert and not a psychotic: for the subject to be able to withdraw her belief, the symbolic order already has to be effective; that is, as the case of cinematic fetishism shows, for the spectator to be skeptical about film's reality, to overcome her own interactive engagement with the Other, she simultaneously has to presuppose someone else's belief in it. Skeptical knowledge here is thus not simply the opposite of belief; it is rather the very form in which the fetishist film viewer keeps practicing belief, through the disavowal and sublation of her previous neurotic performance of it.

What this skeptical fetishist misses, however, as Žižek argues, is the "symbolic efficiency" of her actions, the fact that her emptied out/disavowed rituals do register in the symbolic order without her knowledge, and that their effects sooner or later will fall back on her.[27] I believe that this is also what Cavell suggests when he argues that skepticism in the cinema is an untenable position, despite the fact that film viewers are skeptics when they enter the theater:

> Film is a moving image of skepticism: not only is there a reasonable possibility, it is a fact that here our normal senses are satisfied of reality while reality does not exist—even, alarmingly, *because* it does not exist, because viewing it is all it takes . . . The basis of film's drama, or the latent anxiety in viewing its drama, lies in its persistent demonstration that *we do not know what our conviction in reality turns upon*.[28]

What Cavell is driving at here, moving beyond Strauss, is what in Lacanian terms can be described as the gap between the skeptical knowledge of the fetishist and her unconscious conviction in film's reality produced by the symbolic efficiency of the cinematic apparatus that escapes her; what Žižek called the "unknown knowns" of the subject's symbolic economy.[29]

This, I argue, implies the breakdown of the fetishistic relation to cinema; indeed, in Cavell's framework, film's ontology cannot be replaced by fetishism because we *cannot but believe* in its reality, despite our attempts to disavow this belief. The magic of cinema is not the illusion that the naïve observer falls for but is produced rather as the necessary consequence of the skeptical-fetishist position itself. In Hegelian terms, such an understanding of film involves the shift from positing reflection to external reflection. For Hegel, positing reflection is a movement of thought that seems to lock the subject inside the projections of her mind as anything external appears to be the product of her self-reflecting positing activity whereby she first redoubles and then negates herself as other. Nevertheless, the crucial point Hegel makes is that in order to perform this self-relating negativity, the subject does have to presuppose the horizon of the Other outside herself,[30] or in Lacanian terms, her Imaginary already needs the Symbolic order in the background. Cinematic fetishism is

an attempt to push to the end positing reflection's skepticism about external reality; it shows how the spectator's private universe aims to close upon itself, negating her alienated creative apparatus by disavowing her belief in. Such an imaginary closure, however, is impossible as this very act of disavowal keeps presupposing the symbolic order as external through the subject supposed to believe.

In the case of film, as long as the presupposition of this externality is successfully channeled into the fetish, produced through the knotting together of the imaginary signifier and the credulous observer, skepticism prevails over conviction in "the world viewed" (or rather, this conviction remains unconscious). The full potential of film is realized only when the symbolic efficiency already presupposed by the skeptic catches up with her, so to speak, and appears in external reflection as a truly alien automatism that arrests her positing activity.

To put it differently, sooner or later the moving images of film produce a short circuit of belief between the *as if* of the fetishist spectator and the *supposed to* of her fetish-object, activating what Žižek calls "the answer of the real," making her pass through a moment of psychosis, a shock that that disrupts her comfortable skepticism[31]: "what is unbearable in my encounter with the object is that in it, I see myself in the guise of a suffering object what reduces me to a fascinated passive observer is the scene of *myself* passively enduring it."[32] Such and encounter confronts us with the primordially repressed passive core of our fundamental fantasy, with the fact that human subjectivity as such is interpassive, that in order to be able to function on an everyday level a piece of ourselves standing in for an unbearable fullness of (passive) enjoyment always already had to be "cut off" through what Lacan called symbolic castration, and it always already had to be fantasmatically embodied in *objet a*, the interpassive stand-in for the subject that the pervert fetishizes. In film, it is this primordially externalized interpassive object that gazes back at us, opening up a non-fetishistic yet interpassive relation to the Other, traversing the fundamental fantasy through its reenactment.

Digital Interactivity

Does such a cinematic encounter with the real change, however, with the shift to digital media? I aim to answer this question not by investigating the empirical material of the digital but by mapping the different configuration of the symbolic it presupposes. In theorizing this difference, I follow, here along with Manovich, Deleuze's distinction between "analogue" disciplinary societies and "digital" societies of control. While the former involves centralized power mechanisms that (like the externalized cinematic apparatus) identify, represent, and discipline individuals, the latter eliminates such symbolic prostheses of industrial-bureaucratic modernity, dissipating

power among its millions of "dividuals," fragmented subjective practices in control of their self-regulation (e.g., through new social media, etc.).[33] This suggests that unlike Strauss's neurotically split relation to the phallic signifier, which also characterizes the Cavellian skeptic's initial stance toward film projections, this Deleuzian subject in control of new media finds herself in a paranoid (psychotic) relation to the symbolic order, a position that is both the prize and the price of her liberation, where the gap necessary for the big Other's efficiency, the gap between the Other as our powerful creative proxy and the Other as a lacking, blind mechanism collapses. A case in point is Manovich's vision about the neurotechnological implantation of the formerly externalized cinematic apparatus, a move toward the elimination of the gap in the symbolic and as such properly paranoid. The question here is how could such subjects of the digital nonetheless avoid the psychotic mental collapse that should follow this foreclosure of the symbolic? How is it possible that Manovich sees the soon-to-be implanted computerized automatisms of new media that minimize human intentionality through templates, scripts, filters, and so on, not as the intrusion of an all-knowing and all-powerful Other but as benevolent transcendental categories that pre-form reality for us, prepare it for our creative interaction?[34] What kind of symbolic order is at work here that enables and stabilizes such a postphallic existence?

I claim that, paradoxically, it is fetishistic disavowal that (re)introduces the symbolic into the landscape of digital psychosis, creating a split, a lack in the Other's absolute knowledge precisely by fetishizing it, turning it into a medium that is supposed to believe while reappropriating its knowledge "democratically" for the new universal pervert subject.[35] Contemporary practices of interpassivity pointing toward this direction include recording television programs without actually watching them later, in which case the DVR acts as the interpassive spectator who does the viewing for us, similarly to the laugh track in comedy shows that laughs not so much with us but instead of us, so that at the end of the day we are objectively entertained without having to perform even the passive act of enjoyment.[36]

The difference between this "digital" interpassive exchange and its "analog" version employed by Strauss and the film fetishist is that here, the subject's neurotic ritual of belief is not simply disavowed after its performance, but this very moment of enactment, the anxiety-ridden dialectic of voyeurism and exhibitionism itself is also fully taken over by the medium (as in canned laughter for which to work, one doesn't actually have to laugh or follow the joke anymore). The digital fetishist is not out there to fool anybody into believing; she is not a skeptic unaware of the symbolic efficiency of her belief that remains in place even after its disavowal. She is rather a cynic who doesn't even pretend to believe anymore as if she had learned the lesson of film and were fully aware now that disavowed beliefs have to return to those who disavowed them. Unlike the skeptic, who posited (interactively) the creative other and presupposed (interpassively) someone else's belief in it, the cynic seems to avoid

presupposition and its consequence, external reflection, by directly *positing* the fetish-Other as split, as caught in a self-relating ("canned") short-circuit that bears an uncanny resemblance to the film viewer's previous state of encounter with the gaze of the real.

What is missing from this new fetishism is a space where the dialectic between voyeurism and exhibitionism, public and private used to be played out and synthesized into a cinematic space made up of small others in the audience who were supposed to believe for each other. In recent Hollywood productions, the additional dimension introduced to live action films by the addition of CGI can be seen as an alternative to this social space of cinema, with computer-animated characters like Jar-Jar Binks, Gollum, or Wall-E, serving as a new "canned" fetish-audience. The anxiety in their eyes and the ridiculous repetitiveness of their gestures expresses our own former cinematic condition of external reflection, the inability to escape the short-circuit of belief, the idiotic, passive enjoyment at the core of modern subjectivity, which is now becoming an internal matter of the digital, at a safe distance from the human spectator. For this reason, the ontological place of these figures is the same as that of the glitch, the truth of new media's automation principle, the symptomal point of its all too human madness.

It is against this manifested but contained madness of the digital signifier that the wisdom of the cynic posits itself; the newly improved exhibitionist part of her interactive performance—creating the world through the public exploration of the infinite variability of new media—now coincides, without any neurotic gap to expose her belief, with its opposite (voyeuristic) aspect; with what Žižek calls the ideology of Western Buddhism, the a letting go of control to "drift along while retaining an inner distance and indifference toward the mad dance of this accelerated process, a distance based on the insight that all this social and technological upheaval is ultimately just a non-substantial proliferation of semblances [that] do not really concern the innermost kernel of our being."[37] This is how for the new digital fetishist, to paraphrase Žižek, the entire drama of external reflection (interpassivity) can now take place within the field of positing (interactivity):[38] while the film viewer had to experience her fundamental decenterment upon encountering the interpassive gaze of the Other she disavowed but presupposed, the digital fetishist can rely now on her new medium to go through such a decenterment instead of her, a performance that coincides with the hard labor of pre-forming the world into a spectacle of lack. Through cynicism, we can avoid what used to be an inevitable, anxiety-ridden encounter with the real by interactively disavowing-through-positing as a fetish-Other even the very act of our own former interpassive presupposition of belief, sublating it into a *subject posited to presuppose belief,* whose presupposition—the cynic knows very well—is always bound to collapse. The cynic, guided by the morals of the digital, takes control over this new medium (let it be CGI, Facebook, or the deregulated financial market) precisely by letting it function as a blind,

lacking and faulty mechanism, without *believing* in its power to resignify the symbolic, that is, in her own power to change the world.

Notes

1. D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 66.
2. See Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," *Film Quarterly* Vol. 28, No. 2 (1974): 39–47 and Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16 (3)(1975): 6–18.
3. Rodowick, *Virtual Life*, 66.
4. Ibid., 42.
5. Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 40.
6. Rodowick, *Virtual Life*, 66.
7. Lev Manovich, *The Language of the New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 32–36; It is worth noting here that Manovich prefers not to use the term interactivity to describe the specificity of new media because he sees it as something that can be part of any medium. See Ibid. 55–62.
8. Slavoj Žižek, "Cyberspace, or, How to Traverse the Fantasy in the Age of the Retreat of the Big Other" *Public Culture* 10(3)(1998): 483.
9. Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York: Verso, 2009), 141.
10. see Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier* (London: Macmillan, 1982).
11. Robert Pfaller, "The Work of Art that Observes Itself" (paper presented at Amber Festival '08, Istanbul, Turkey, November 8, 2008), 08.amberfestival .org/public/file_5.DOC
12. Lev Manovich, "From the Externalization of the Psyche to the Implantation of Technology" *manovich.net,* 1995, http://manovich.net/TEXT/externalization .html
13. Friedrich Nietzsche, "David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer," in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche Vol. 4.* (London: T. N. Foulis, 1910), 19.
14. Ibid., 24.
15. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morals* (Arlington, VI: Richer Resources Publications, 2009), 14.
16. Nietzsche, *David Strauss*, 39.
17. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, 189.
18. Nietzsche, *David Strauss*, 39.
19. Ibid., 51.
20. on the concept of the subject supposed to believe see Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 110.
21. Žižek, *Cyberspace*, 483; Pfaller, Work of Art.
22. Metz, *Psychoanalysis*, 72.
23. Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 113.
24. Metz, *Psychoanalysis*, 76.
25. Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2007), 93.

26. Slavoj Žižek, "How the Non-Duped Err." *Qui Parle* Vol. 4, No. 1 (1990): 11.
27. Žižek, *How to Read*, 33.
28. Cavell quoted in Rodowick, *Virtual Life*, 67, my italics.
29. Žižek, *How to Read*, 52.
30. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 347.
31. Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 34.
32. Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies*, 151.
33. Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control" *October* Vol. 59 (1992): 3–7.
34. Manovich, *New Media*, 32–36.
35. see also Jodi Dean's formula: "when everyone has the right to know, the technologies believe for us"; Jodi Dean, *Publicity's Secret: How Technoculture Capitalizes on Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 160.
36. Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies*, 149.
37. Žižek, *On Belief*, 13.
38. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 2009), 256.

Beyond the Beyond: CGI and the Anxiety of Overperfection[1]

By Hugh S. Manon

The goal of this essay is modest: to differentiate traditional analog filmmaking from new modalities of digital cinema in light of the psychoanalytic conceptions of desire and anxiety. Through a series of three examples, each of which bears the structure of a mirror, I seek to complicate existing theories of digital representation by foregrounding the notion—developed by Slavoj Žižek in *Looking Awry* and other early works—that the human subject is lured most profoundly when a representation admits some measure of real truth. Recent advances in digital image manipulation such as computer-generated imagery (CGI) and motion capture have engendered filmmakers' pursuit of a pixel-polished hyperrealism. However, this approach, premised as it is on the attainability of a satisfying fullness, fails to incorporate the gaps, stains, and ruptures upon which traditional analog special effects flourished over much of the twentieth century. In a pointedly Žižekian sense, CGI *fails to fail*, and in doing so omits a crucial component of the subjective lure: the admission by the deceiver that a deception is in the offing. In other words, what Žižek calls the "double deception" of the Symbolic order is being digitally eradicated in favor of an Imaginary-order "single" deception.[2]

At the same time, the paradigm shift from analog to digital technology can be understood as instituting a problem for modern audiences, whereby the innate repletion of the digital does not provide opportunities for desire, but instead triggers anxiety, a subjective state in which lack itself is lacking. Although producers and devotees of big-budget CGI spectacles might deny it, digital cinema is increasingly guilty of succeeding too well, and too easily. In the words of Greg Tuck, "The problem is not that [spectacular CGI] images are not visually impressive, but that they are too visually impressive and remain trapped within a logic of visual quantification."[3] In the digital era,

motion pictures are expected to deliver increasingly high levels of verisimilitude, eliminating the gaps, noise, and errors characteristic of analog film. In this way, presumptions about the viability of full attainment have become part of digital cinema's ontology. To state it in the strongest terms, we might say that in every instance, both the production and reception of CG cinema are staked in the assumption that mastery is really possible, and this poses a problem for the human subject, for whom mastery is impossible and perpetual dissatisfaction is constitutive.

In order to better understand the shift away from a cinema of desire and toward a cinema of anxiety, I begin by examining two particular flaws through which traditional analog cinema succeeds by failing: the appearance of mirror reflections on screen and the split-screen technique employed in a whole series of films about identical twins. Each of these scenarios is premised on an ostensible identicality within the diegesis, but in each case a gap is produced that interrupts the symmetry we behold on screen, undermining the film's realism. Such representational flaws, I argue, are viewed as anathema by the creators of CG cinema and are thus summarily eradicated or smoothed over, creating a different problem altogether: not a desire based on lack, but an anxiety of overperfection.

In proceeding along these lines, I implicitly call into question a basic premise that underpins much contemporary film studies scholarship. Historians of film style such as David Bordwell have argued that the crux of classical Hollywood style involves a prohibition on revealing the behind-the-scenes aspects of film production. Bordwell takes as axiomatic the notion that "the naive spectator takes the style of the classical Hollywood film to be invisible or seamless."[4] Considering the ongoing digital revolution in cinema, however, this assumption appears less tenable, or at the very least premature. While it is surely true that the vast majority of classical Hollywood productions *aimed* at formal seamlessness and self-effacement, this aim was always overburdened by the technical limitations of analog-era production methods. I am thinking of problems so basic as turbulent camera movements, the appearance of film grain in low-light cinematography, electromagnetic interference and hiss/scratches on audio tracks, and so on. Such flaws were endemic to analog production and must be understood as indexing the various technological obstacles that, for predigital filmmakers, were only ever partially surmountable.

Borrowing a term from Žižek's lexicon, these disruptive, but structurally necessary "stains" appear prominently in analog-era productions such as *Gun Crazy* (Joseph H. Lewis, 1950) and *The Man with My Face* (Edward J. Montagne, 1951). In each case, we encounter the Lacanian dialectic of desire *per se*, and in two ways. On the one hand, we have the desires of viewers, whose interactions with cinema involve a carefully regulated interplay of satisfaction and lack. On the other hand, we have the desires of analog-era filmmakers, who craftily worked within the limitations of technology, and even embraced these limitations, working in sync with lack, rather than futilely seeking to eradicate

it. Indeed, from our vantage point in the era of digital perfectibility, we can see that Bordwell's assumption betrays a naive fantasy of his own: that seamlessness and satisfaction were even modestly achievable in the realm of analog filmmaking, and that such tidied-up, easily digestible continuity would have been preferable to viewers in the first place. Counter to this, I want to view analog-era cinema as by definition a messy, phony, highly artificial medium whose limitations are self-evident and constantly on display. For tinkerers in media production such as myself, who were finely attuned to the vagaries of analog media technology when the digital miracle came along, this distinction appears in high relief, and in ways that Bordwell's fundamentally analog-era scholarship probably could not have anticipated.

What, then, defines classical Hollywood style? One way to answer this question is through a simple but necessary modification of Bordwell's premise. Classical Hollywood does not in fact execute anything like seamlessness and self-effacement, but instead *fantasizes about the possibility* of executing seamlessness and self-effacement. This is a crucial ontological distinction, not a minor semantic one. Analog cinema *wishes* it could achieve a kind of direct neural connection between the viewer and the film's story-world, but in practice it can only deliver something else: a series of errors, flaws, and gaps that pointedly rupture the illusion of seamlessness in seductive ways. The assumptions made by the creators and consumers of digital CGI are opposite: that seamlessness is both possible and desirable. However, at the point that such perfectionism is no longer a fantasy, but instead a viable reality, we must acknowledge that cinema culture has entered a distinct new phase, having taken its place in what Todd McGowan calls "the emerging society of enjoyment."[5] Indeed, the wild international success of CGI-spawned blockbusters such as *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009) is a good indicator that *jouissance* has mostly (if not yet entirely) overtaken lack-based desire as mainstream cinema's prime mover.

In order to substantiate these claims, the three films I have chosen to analyze seek, in various ways, to deliver a kind of perfect binarism or mirror symmetry on screen. In the first film, *Gun Crazy*, mirrors appear within the diegesis, disrupting the viewer's seamless involvement in the film's *mise-en-scène* and plot. In the second film, *The Man with My Face*, mirror symmetry emerges in various scenes in which the lead actor, Barry Nelson, portrays both the film's protagonist and his twin within the same shot, through the use of optical mattes. In both of these analog-era films, to approach precise symmetry is necessarily to create a diegetic rupture, as if traditional cinema were unable to bear the weight of such perfection within the frame. In my third example, the digital era megablockbuster *Avatar*, a very different symmetry appears, wherein the film's flesh-and-blood protagonist comes to inhabit an artificially constructed body whose actions and expressions mirror his own. In assuming his otherworldly avatar, Jake Sully (Sam Worthington) steps into the skin of what psychoanalysis terms the *imago*, and when he does the viewer

encounters a world, and an aesthetic, utterly devoid of lack. At this point of full and flawless attainment, I argue that we have entered the domain of anxiety *per se*, a threshold that is unwittingly acknowledged when director James Cameron proclaims that his team of digital artists has managed to surmount the "uncanny valley."

Mirror, Mirror

The 1950 film noir *Gun Crazy* is well-known as an inventive and relatively low-budget stylistic *tour de force* for director Joseph H. Lewis. In a scene that concludes the film's first act, sideshow marksman Annie Laurie Starr (Peggy Cummins) is confronted by Packett (Berry Kroeger), her boss and spurned lover, about her decision to leave him and the travelling carnival for a new life with gun enthusiast Bart Tare (John Dall). The discussion begins calmly, with Laurie adjusting her makeup in a wobbly mirror above her vanity, but the scene erupts in violence when the drunk Packett physically accosts Laurie. Suddenly Bart enters the room and we see his defocused reflection in the mirror. He fires a shot, deliberately missing Packett's head and shattering the mirror, reducing Packett's reflection to fragmented shards. The camera pushes in dramatically and pauses as Packett confronts his own shattered self-image. Immediately following this, we see a reverse shot of the trailer's interior from a point within the mirror itself, with angular shards of opaque glass suspended in the upper right corner of the screen.

Director Lewis has clearly given some thought to the metaphorical implications of mirrors, as they appear in several of the film's crucial scenes. However, my interest concerns the single shot of Packett facing his own image—a shot that darkly recapitulates the child's encounter with its *imago* during the Lacanian mirror stage. What we see in the partially shattered glass is an impossible bifurcation of our perspective that ruptures both the seamless consistency of the film's diegesis, as well our relation to it. Packett's image is seen twice, side-by-side, in the same frame.

On the near side of the mirror—both in this shot and those that precede it—actor Kroeger's body has been carefully lit and blocked so as to provide the viewer with an optimal "Hollywood" view. His face is accessible, clear and pleasingly framed. However, when Bart fires the gunshot and the camera pushes in to Packett's reflection, the story-world suddenly appears derealized. It is as if we are observing the film's production in a detached, clinically objective way, instead of remaining engaged at the level of affect. I want to argue that this sudden, rupturing sense of detachment may occur in any scene, and in any fiction film, in which the camera invites the audience to behold an on-screen mirror. Why is this? Why do shots into a mirror break the diegesis, even when they do not necessarily reveal the camera, lighting set-up, production crew, or other details of the filmmaking process?

Figure 14.1   An on-screen mirror fractures diegetic space in *Gun Crazy* (Joseph H. Lewis, 1950, USA).

The effect can be understood as rendering the gaze (*le regard*) in precisely the Lacanian sense. As in Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (1533)—which serves as Lacan's linchpin example of the gaze—a filmed mirror contains two angles of view, each at odds with the other.[6] However, unlike the highly intentional contrivance of the distended skull in Holbein's painting, the diegetic inconsistency of the mirror's gaze derives from its semi-accidental inclusion of a lighting scheme, camera angle, and screen direction that is out of square with the stylistic organization of the overall scene. Wrongly lit for the point in space the camera occupies, wrongly focused, and (in *Gun Crazy*, because the mirror is wobbling and angled slightly downward) out of skew with the planar orientation of the film's set, the mirror image is like the "gleam of light" in Lacan's famous anecdote from Seminar XI.

In this allegedly autobiographical story, the young Lacan is slumming it on a small boat with a group of local fishermen. When one of the fisherman calls Lacan's attention to a glint of light on the water—a reflection from a floating sardine can—Lacan, a burgeoning intellectual of a higher class than the fishermen, suddenly feels himself "out of place in the picture."[7] As with the light reflecting back from the sardine can, you may look at an image of a mirror on-screen, but you will soon recognize that, in the words of one of the fishermen,

"*it doesn't see you!*" In other words, the mirror's reflection is indifferent to your look—not staged for you, not part of the "I"-centered Cartesian field that you (with Hollywood's help) normally believe yourself to occupy. The filmed mirror is a gaze because, like Holbein's distorted skull and the glint of light from the sardine can, it is a signifier without a signified; in its glaring prominence, the ambiguous gaze returned by the mirror regards us from a point beyond the image, disrupting our field of vision and destabilizing our geometrical place within it.[8]

By delivering two angles at once, the appearance of a mirror on screen momentarily shatters the fantasy of cinematic space, breaking the diegesis by reminding us that other lines of sight exist. Such ruptures, I argue, are not inimical to cinema, but ontologically central. Failures of realism are what makes cinema cinema, because without them the diegesis would lack any sense of a beyond. Cinematic symmetry is not limited to on-screen mirrors, however, and in the next section, I turn to a second film noir that involves the commission of a "too perfect" criminal conspiracy—a film in which an instance of bodily mirroring appears in the realm of analog special effects.

Facing Off

Shot on location in San Juan, Puerto Rico, the low budget 1951 film *The Man with My Face* can be understood as a lightweight travelogue variant on the *film noir* "perfect crime" plot, as well as a precursor to the kinds of stories that later appear in television series such as *The Twilight Zone* (1959–64) and *The Outer Limits* (1963–65). At the same time, the film's B-movie frugality lends it a kind of elemental purity and instructive force. Built on the trope of an impossible doppelganger, this modest film has something to teach us about cinema, the human body, and perfectibility. In *The Man with My Face*, split-screen optical effects combine with careful blocking in order to create the sense of a character uncannily interacting with his identical look-alike on screen. Such sequences, I argue, are misunderstood entirely if we assume that the audience does not perceive the trick. Mismatched eyelines, awkwardly timed dialogue, and the glaringly necessary dead zone at the center of the screen—elements that are present in all "twin films" of the analog era—serve as opportunities for viewers to simultaneously witness and disavow the falsity of cinematic production.

Charles "Chick" Graham is an accountant who has returned to Puerto Rico after he had been stationed there prior to overseas service during the war. He has a normal life, a somewhat dissatisfying marriage, a small house and a loyal dog. Trouble soon begins when Chick's wife Cora fails to pick him up at his place of work at the usual 5:00 PM. When Chick calls home, Cora acts as if she doesn't recognize his voice, and he later discovers that a man who looks exactly like him has casually taken up residence in his house. To all outward appearances, Chick's world is seemingly the same, and internally it remains

consistent, yet the protagonist has suddenly been written out of his own picture. In voice-over, we hear Chick ruminate on his sudden alienation:

> That's right, you've got troubles—big troubles. Yesterday you were Charles Graham. Today you're Albert Rand, a bank robber, a killer. Okay, so you didn't do it. Can you prove it? After all, he's got your signature, your fingerprints, your face. Who's gonna prove you're Chick Graham?

What do we have here if not a hyperbolic, quintessentially *noir* restaging of the split subjectivity Lacan describes in his 1949 paper on the mirror stage?[9] Chick gazes at his *imago*—a perfect picture of himself, occupying the very environment that he himself typically inhabits. Yet suddenly he has been ejected from the comfortable place he has built for himself, barred from access to his identity, with no way of returning to that lost state.

In a most literal way, the arrival of Chick's doppelganger is the fictional equivalent of the "dehiscence" Lacan associates with the child's passage through the mirror stage. Quoting Lacan, "One has to assume a certain biological gap in [man], which I try to define when I talk to you about the mirror stage . . . The human being has a special relation with his own image—a relation of gap, of alienating tension."[10] This "alienating tension" is built into the form of *The Man with My Face*, especially in the shots where both "Chicks" appear together in the same shot, yet are strangely sequestered at opposite sides of the frame. In these shots, the alienation of the mirror stage is rendered formally through a cinematic technique called a split-screen process shot, in which opaque mattes are used to shoot two performances by the same actor, first on one side of the screen and then on the other. The shots are joined together either in-camera (by rewinding the film) or in post-production by using an optical printer.

In these recombined shots, eye-lines between the twins appear slightly mismatched. Especially in medium shots, in which the two figures argue about which one is the real Chick, they seem to look *through* each other rather than *at* each other. In other split-screen shots, actor Barry Nelson's gaze lags behind as he attempts to convincingly track the movement of other actors, who weren't there at the time of filming, as they walk across the other side of the room. Moreover, dialogue in the various twin scenes is oddly paced because it was filmed separately, in two different takes. In one scene, Chick returns to the house with a police officer, who sees the impostor Chick and asks the obvious question, "You two gentlemen are twins?" There is an unnaturally long two-second pause before the impostor returns, "Believe me officer, I never saw the guy before in my life."

I want to argue that the basic premise of any classical Hollywood twin film—its major trope and seductive hook—involves a full recognition that the two twins are played by the same actor and that the film is full of optical trickery. To engage with such a representation involves a complex interplay, as well

Figure 14.2   An eye-line mismatch in *The Man with My Face* (Edward Montagne, 1951, USA).

as a tacit understanding, between the filmmakers and their audience: *I know that you know that I know that you know* that this is an illusion. The pleasure derives from seeing through the trick, and then re-tricking oneself by suspending disbelief. Rather than aiming at a perfect deception—one that the viewer would not notice—the film grants the audience a certain amount of agency, assuming that we are sophisticated enough to toy with the evident falsity of representations. In this way, the film fails in order to succeed, only ever partly "pulling off" the illusion, and in doing so creates a Symbolic-order lure—a "double deception" in Žižek's terms—as opposed to a simple, Imaginary-order deception. In a manner underscored by its "evil twin" trope, *The Man with My Face* is merely doing what all analog cinema does: offering forth a visually interesting trick that in every way posits a *beyond*, a set of actors, a production team, and an industry, all seeking a degree of invisibility, but whose traces we nonetheless witness. The film is not simply a reality we take for granted and allow to transport us away, but a flawed point of connection to the mysterious and alluring zone beyond the screen.

The twin film is another form of cinematic mirroring—an attempt to deliver perfection in the form of bodily identicalness. In its original analog form, the twin film embodies and in many ways embraces the technological challenges involved in the production of an on-screen *imago*. Ultimately, films such as

The Man with My Face succeed by failing—by allowing the seams, gaps, and misalignments endemic to real-world production to become a seductive part of the fiction. The result is a game-like occultation in which the viewer is momentarily aware of the trick and at turns disavows this knowledge. Viewer pleasure is produced in the alternation between skepticism and belief. As I go on to explain, however, modern CGI is very different in its approach, aiming at full believability through an erasure of flaws, and thus fails to synchronize with the lack-seeking imperative within human desire.

Beyond the Beyond

Although there may be no obvious link between film noir, twin films, and post-millennial CGI blockbusters such as James Cameron's *Avatar*, a great deal can be gained by viewing a digital "avatar" as a kind of twin that remains separated from its user by a mirror-like technological boundary. *Avatar* begins with the death of protagonist Jake Sully's twin brother, develops as he fully assumes his brother's former role, and ends with Jake apparently renouncing his (damaged) body in order to permanently assume the more idealized form of his second self, a Na'vi warrior on the planet Pandora. At the level of plot, this is a film concerned with identicality, as well as with the paradox of a being who is quasi-other: a perfect mirror of the subject, but one relegated to a place "over there," on the other side. At the same time, owing to its complex and highly self-aware deployment of advanced CGI techniques, *Avatar* can be understood as a commentary on the post-millennial rise of the digital *imago*, as well as its alienating perfectibility.

In a 2009 interview for Discovery News, director James Cameron delineates a scale of realism in computer animation, extending from "a talking moose" on the unrealistic side, to a photorealistic "absolute human." He explains that, unlike in previous films, *Avatar*'s approach to CGI takes into account the viewer's complex relation to that which seems natural, but is not natural:

> As you approach human, our attraction to the character goes down, and then at the last second, just when you get to a true human look, it goes back up. Well, we needed to get on the far side of that dip in the response curve, which is called the "uncanny valley." We needed to get to the opposite side.[11]

Needless to say, Cameron believes that the sophisticated performance-capture technology developed for *Avatar* did, in fact, surmount the uncanny valley, conveying bodily movements and facial expressions so lifelike that the viewer's attraction to the characters remains high throughout.

Cameron's statements come as part of a broader digital-era fascination with the concept of the uncanny. The theory of the uncanny valley was developed in the 1970s in relation to robotics as a means of explaining a common human

perception of something unsettling or "not quite right" when interacting with humanoid robots that possessed real-seeming skin, eyes, and hair.[12] In the early 2000s, the term entered popular culture largely through discussions in online forums about the appearance of characters in video games, and has been appropriated in the popular press to critique disturbing moments in CG film-making, such as the dead-seeming eyes of characters noted by some reviewers of the children's film *The Polar Express* (Robert Zemeckis, 2004).

Interestingly, the graphical curve-based account of the uncanny valley originally developed by roboticist Masahiro Mori, and glibly referenced by director Cameron, is not at all at odds with the account of the uncanny proffered by psychoanalysis. Both accounts involve an undesirable excess of familiarity, a sense that we have tripped over our own desire by coming too close to realization, as if something that should have remained in shadow has shockingly come to light. However, whereas James Cameron believes a film like *Avatar* has surmounted the uncanny valley by capturing his actors' performance and expressions from multiple angles and with a high degree of detail, his comment simultaneously raises the question of whether the perfectibility inherent in CGI makes it impossible to show anything less than *too much*.

As Lacan notes in Seminar X, the crucial text for understanding the structure of anxiety is Freud's "The Uncanny." The reason for this has to do with Freud's emphasis on the familiar, quasi-domestic proximity from which the uncanny emerges. In Lacan's formulation, the "appalling certainty"[13] of anxiety accords precisely with the uncanny in that both are "not without an object."[14] These statements makes little sense, however, unless we recall that, for Lacan, the crucial object for the human subject is the *objet a*, which the subject experiences as a structure of partition, veiling, or inaccessibility. What anxiety is "not without," then, is the lure of *beyond-ness* itself: the *objet a*. Anxiety emerges when this place of lack—a place expected to seduce us with a question—is instead full, replete with answers. Slavoj Žižek clarifies this Lacanian precept in a passage from *Looking Awry*:

> [A]nxiety occurs not when the object-cause of desire is lacking; it is not the lack of the object that gives rise to anxiety but, on the contrary, the danger of our getting too close to the object and thus losing the lack itself. Anxiety is brought on by the disappearance of desire.[15]

In anxiety, then, what is feared is not failure but success.[16] As success-driven projects, digital productions in various media tend to overlook the paradox that, in the face of repletion, human desire has nowhere to go. Seemingly desirable in itself, full and total access leads inevitably to anxiety, the death of desire.

Although we could focus on any number of elements that typify the anxiety of the CG aesthetic, of particular note is *Avatar*'s pathologically frontal approach to tracking its major characters, alien life forms, and military technology. The film's virtual camera literally never stops moving, undulating around the action

in graceful slow arcs, impossibly traversing various alien terrains, and carefully framing key characters and objects so that nothing is missed. Indeed, it is difficult to locate a single shot in which a major action is obscured or a character is made to drift into or out of frame. This sovereign attitude is typical of postmillennial CGI and can be characterized in a single word: *centripetal*. Such orbital, center-directed shots must be understood as optimally Cartesian, delivering an ideal view that is smooth, perfectly lit, evenly paced, and does not telegraph or lag behind the objects whose movements it tracks. At times, *Avatar*'s images will even shift instantaneously from full-speed to half-speed slow motion when the action demands it. Although cinema has traditionally strived to appeal to an "ideal viewer," modern computer-generated images are obsessively idealized, accompanied by a camera style that is almost sickeningly complaisant.

A particularly egregious example of *Avatar*'s compulsorily Cartesian approach to moving-camera occurs in the jungle scenes in which Jake, new to Pandora, confronts a herd of hammerhead titanotheres and then the giant panther-like thanator. In these shots, the virtual camera gyroscopically whirls through space so that, despite the creatures' quickness, their heads and eyes remain perfectly in frame. It is as if the camera is hard-wired to the animals' neurology, an extension of their being. The fact that such centripetal movements were impossible in the realm of analog filmmaking should go without saying, but at the same time this raises a curious question about why other elements of traditional filmmaking—three-point lighting, shot/reverse-shot editing, racking focus, and even lens flare—persist almost nostalgically within *Avatar*. Given these other throwbacks, it is shocking that Hollywood, which often flags or rejects movie titles and script ideas as being too "on the nose," is willing to abide CGI's oppressively centripetal approach to cinematography. Such techniques, I believe, leave our psychology begging for a little *less* of a good thing.

Prior to the climactic battle in *Avatar*, the sacred tree of Pandora is destroyed and Jake's avatar awakens to find himself an outcast, surrounded by total devastation. In voice-over he says, "I was in the place the eye does not see." However, having seen Pandora (and seen it and seen it again) one must concede that no such place exists in the realm of CG filmmaking. The film's swooping virtual camera, along with other digital contrivances too numerous to mention, guarantee that everything on Pandora is abundantly visible and nothing remains veiled. However, from a Lacanian perspective, this lack of a beyond means that there can be no subjective lure. The film's hyper-Cartesian spectacle is explained in part by James Cameron's avowed focus on innovation. In describing what compelled him to sit down and write *Avatar*, Cameron has said: "I was the CEO of a big visual effects company and I wanted to challenge that visual effects company to go beyond—not just beyond what everybody else was doing, but *beyond the beyond*."[17] In a strong sense, Cameron has succeeded; however, in going "beyond the beyond," his film lacks the imagined place beyond the veil—the very place at which our desire is targeted. In *Avatar*,

this place of lack has been filled to the point of overflowing. To conceive of an elusive "beyond" to the film's dazzling digital surface seems naïve, old fashioned, and entirely beside the point.

Film theorist D. N. Rodowick has noted, "In a previous era of cinematic creation, the physical world both inspired and resisted the imagination; in the age of digital synthesis, physical reality has entirely yielded to the imagination."[18] From a Žižekian perspective, we might add that in CGI moviemaking, the awkwardness and unpredictability of the Real has yielded almost entirely to the slick sheen of the Imaginary. Poor technical execution does not explain why CGI creatures, settings, and actions often fail to impress. In other words, the problem isn't that the technology isn't good enough or that the CGI designers lack skill. Instead, on both counts, the problem is that CGI is *too* technically proficient, too clean, and thus out of sync with a human desire based on lack.

Conclusion: *CGImago*

Orson Welles once said, "[T]he enemy of art is the absence of limitations."[19] In developing production methods that are defined by their relative limitlessness—their lack of lack itself—CG media sacrifices art on the altar of the imago. In Lacan's description of the mirror stage, the imago is at first glance delightful to the child that beholds it, as it appears to bring the two sides of the mirror into square. Ultimately, however, the imago becomes a harbinger of the speaking subject's perpetual inability to fully inhabit the place of "I"—the signifier under which the subject falls.

Without realizing it, CGI produces an imago when it employs digital technology to access the other side of the mirror: a perfect, cleaned-up, ideal version of what analog cinema had sought all along. The backlash of such an effort is an anxiety of overabundance. At the level of the algorithms and fractals that comprise it, all CGI is self-identical, based as it is on mathematically perfect symmetries. This results in the paradox that the more a computer-generated *mise-en-scène* varies in its details, the more it appears uncannily the same. Lacking the flaws endemic to analog modes of production, viewers of CGI are perpetually dazzled, but never desire to know the secret behind the illusion, because the answer is always the same.

Notes

1. This essay was inspired by a lunch conversation with Todd McGowan and Louis-Paul Willis during the 2012 Žižek Studies Conference in Brockport, New York.
2. Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 73.
3. Greg Tuck, "When More Is Less: CGI, Spectacle and the Capitalist Sublime," *Science Fiction Film and Television* 1.2 (Spring 2008), 264.

4. David Bordwell, "Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrational Principles and Proce-dures," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader,* ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 26.

5. Todd McGowan, *The End of Dissatisfaction?: Jacques Lacan and the Emerging Soci-ety of Enjoyment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 3.

6. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Con-cepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978), 88–9.

7. Ibid., 95–6.

8. The effect of discordance produced by on-screen mirrors becomes more prominent when a film is projected on a large screen (as opposed to being viewed on a com-puter monitor, for instance), and disappears entirely when viewing a still image or freeze-frame of the scene. Furthermore, the rupturing effect of mirrors occurs only in the 2-D realm of cinema, not in our subjective experience of daily life. This is because a screen-projected moving image of mirror introduces an impossible third dimension—that of the "real reality" of the film's set—into the pseudo-three-dimensionality of cinematic space.

9. Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English,* trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 75–81.

10. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis,* trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: Norton, 1988), 323.

11. Discovery Networks, "Avatar: Motion Capture Mirrors Emotions," YouTube video, 2:42, December 24, 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wK1Ixr-UmM.

12. Masahiro Mori, "The Uncanny Valley," *Energy* 7.4 (1970), 33–5; trans. Karl F. MacDorman and Takashi Minato, 2005, http://www.androidscience.com/theun-cannyvalley/proceedings2005/uncannyvalley.html.

13. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety,* trans. Cormac Gal-lagher (Eastbourne: Antony Rowe, 2002), VI, 7.

14. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psycho-analysis*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 2007), 147.

15. Žižek, 8.

16. Lacan, *Anxiety,* iv, 11.

17. Discovery Networks.

18. D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 28.

19. Jason E. Squire, *The Movie Business Book* (New York: Fireside, 2004), 54.

Part IV

Social Media and the Internet

Slavoj Žižek as Internet Philosopher

By Clint Burnham

I want to introduce three different ways of thinking about Slavoj Žižek with respect to the Internet: methodology, reception, theory. First, the ways in which Žižek constructs his texts and makes his arguments can best be understood in the digital, connected practice of the Internet; second, how we in turn read, or DO NOT read, or consume or watch Žižek and his texts and performances signifies something new, post-book or post-codex, about his practice; third, his concept of the "obscene underside of the Law" is a way to talk about various Internet subcultures and texts: LOLcats and trolls, but especially Nigerian spam.

Žižek's Self-Plagiarizing as Technique *Par Excellence* of Writing in the Age of the Internet

A commonplace of Žižek's critics is that he merely "cuts and pastes" sections from one book into another. For example, Žižek's "Melancholy and the Act" section of *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*[1] began as an essay in *Critical Inquiry* the previous year (2000).[2] But here the problem is that Žižek *did not repeat himself enough*—in the *Critical Inquiry* version, he begins his discussion of the big Other with examples from a Hollywood book by Roger Ebert, a set of examples that is dropped from the essay when it is printed in *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*[3] Then, as a kind of *objet petit a* or indivisible remainder, the Ebert passage appears in two other books published at roughly the same time as the *Critical Inquiry* article and the *Totalitarianism?* book (or perhaps even between them): first, in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*[4] and then in his essay "The Real of Sexual Difference."[5] That is, this question of Žižek's plagiarism, or repetition compulsion, is rather a case that, as he writes in

CHU, discussing the big Other, "the spectral supplement to the symbolic Law aims at something more radical: at an obscene narrative kernel that has to be 'repressed' in order to remain operative."[6]

Now, there is a scene in Astra Taylor's *Žižek!* (2005) documentary where we see Žižek working on his computer, writing an essay, and declaring that his method is to begin with notes, or ideas and then at a certain point assemble them into a text, an essay or book; in such a manner, he avoids actually writing, skipping directly from note-taking to editing.[7] And this patchwork or collage method certainly does seem to characterize much of his writing. Thus if a Lacanian scholar seeking Žižek's take on "cyberspace" turns to chapter four of *The Plague of Fantasies* ("Cyberspace, Or, The Unbearable Closure of Being")[8] she first must wade through discussions of Hegel's concept of the "rabble [*Pöbel*]" in modern civil society, the films of Buñuel and Charlie Chaplin on the voice in cinema; even once Žižek starts discussing virtual reality and MUDs, he then turns to his real love *film noir,* with Frank Capra's *Meet John Doe* (1941).

Indeed, such a panoply of references while utterly typical of post-1980s cultural studies (the *Ur*-text surely being Jameson's postmodernism essay, which moved from punk rock to Language poetry, from Andy Warhol to E. L. Doctorow, from the death of the subject to *Star Wars*[9]), that same surfeit of surface is, Žižek argues, a hallmark of the Internet age:

> In cyberspace, we witness a return to *pensée sauvage*, to "concrete," "sensual" thought: an "essay" in cyberspace confronts fragments of music and other sounds, text, images, video clips, and so on, and it is this confrontation of "concrete" elements which produces "abstract" meanings . . . here, are we not again back with Eisenstein's dream of "intellectual montage"—of filming *Capital,* of producing the Marxist theory out of the clash of concrete images? Is not hypertext a new practice of montage?[10]

Readers of Žižek will recognize this passage first of all as one of his bait-and-switch arguments, a "myth about cyberspace" he will quickly disavow; on the next page (168) he argues that there nonetheless is behind this screen, this interface, an "indivisible remainder." But I want to take these two structuring principles—the repetition of his own work and the hypertext-like structure of Žižek's writings themselves—as an indication of a shift from the production regime of the typewriter to the Internet.

And here my point of reference will be contemporary literary production, or what is known as conceptual writing or "flarf." This practice, which ranges from sculpting poems out of Google searches to retyping an entire issue of *The New York Times*, makes the claim that with the Web, writing need no longer create; as Kenneth Goldsmith claims,

> never before has language had so much materiality—fluidity, plasticity, malleability—begging to be actively managed by the writer. Before digital

language, words were almost always found imprisoned on a page. How different it is today, when digitized language can be poured into any conceivable container: text typed into a Microsoft Word document can be parsed into a database, visually morphed into Photoshop, animated in Flash, pumped into online text-mangling engines, spammed to thousands of e-mail addresses, and imported into a sound-editing program and spit out as music.[11]

In a like manner, David J. Gunkel makes the argument that Žižek's philosophical practice and texts can be understood in terms of the twenty-first century concept of the mash-up (*The Grey Album, Pride and Prejudice and Zombies, Django Unchained [2012]*)—that is, as a Žižekian "short circuit" or "parallax" that connects two disparate traditions (be they music—the Beatles and Jay-Z; literary—nineteenth century realism and pulp fiction; or historical—slavery and the spaghetti western): thus in Žižek we find Hegel and Lacan, but also Hitchcock, *Kung Fu Panda*, and Henry James. Gunkel supports his argument that such mash-ups constitute a Žižekian "short-circuit" by citing Žižek's definition of the term, taken from the "Short Circuit" book series that Žižek edits at MIT Press, a textual strategy that might itself constitute a kind of short circuit all on its own:

> A short circuit occurs when there is a faulty connection in the network—faulty, of course, from the stand point of the network's smooth functioning. Is not the shock of short-circuiting, therefore, one of the best metaphors for a critical reading? Is not one of the most effective critical procedures to cross wires that do not usually touch: to take a major classic (text, author, notion), and read it in a short circuiting way, through the lens of a "minor" author, text, or conceptual apparatus ("minor" should be understood here in Deleuze's sense: not "of lesser quality," but marginalized, disavowed by the hegemonic ideology, of dealing with a "lower," less dignified topic)? If the minor reference is well chosen, such a procedure can lead to insights [that] completely shatter and undermine our common perceptions.[12]

The concept occurs widely in Žižek's *oeuvre*: thus the misrecognition inherent in Althusserian interpellation is a kind of short circuit,[13] or the dialectic between prohibition and demand in totalitarianism and the super-ego,[14] or the notion that "emancipatory politics is generated by the short-circuit between the universality of the public use of reason and the universality of the 'part of no part.'"[15]

This list is not exhaustive—the phrase shows up fourteen times in *Metastases of Enjoyment* alone, as well as in the criticism (Dean, Kotsko)—and the variety of uses of the term is symptomatic of how such semantemes develop over the course of Žižek's body of work (*gentrification* and *sublime* are similar Žižekian keywords), but what is also useful to consider here is what I take to be a point of origin for the phrase, in Lacan's discussion of his graphs of desire. Elucidating graph 2, Lacan writes the following:

> This imaginary process, which goes from the specular image to the constitution of the ego along the path of subjectification by the signifier, is signified in my graph by the $\overrightarrow{ra.\,m}$ vector, which is one-way but doubly articulated, first as a short circuit of the $\overrightarrow{\$.\,I(A)}$ vector, and second as a return route of the $\overrightarrow{A.\,s(A)}$.[16]

What the "originary" short circuit in Lacan means, then, is the subject's imaginary misrecognition: seeing itself in the mirror *sans* the other, without making the circuit through the A (Autre), or big Other; Žižek distinguishes between this imaginary identification and Symbolic identification proper: "to achieve self-identity, the subject must identify himself with the imaginary other, he must alienate himself."[17] In like fashion, we should here mark a difference between the *form* of the short circuit in Lacan and its *substance*; if the latter has to do with the question of imaginary identification, the former is a matter of circumventing the symbolic order but at the cost of remaining trapped in a fantasy of said circumvention. And here we return to the question of the short circuit of the Internet itself, or of using Žižek's concept of the short circuit as a way of both characterizing how we function on the net and to criticize the same.

Reception versus Distribution: Philosophy AFTER THE BOOK

For surely Žižek's texts stand in as a test case for the post-codex philosophical work (Kittler, Flusser, David Scott Kastan on digital distribution):[18] while they (often) still exist as books, they also have an important stature in various digital realms, including those that are simply the "digitization" of the codex: from searchable PDFs (as were available online immediately after the publication of his Hegel magnum opus *Less than Nothing* in the summer of 2012), including those available on the important AAAAARG.org website, to the Google book versions, but also the PDFs of individual articles and chapters (thus the *Critical Inquiry* article "A Leftist Plea for Eurocentrism," later reprinted in *The Universal Exception*, is widely available, in a copy that was downloaded in 2010); various online articles ranging from the canonical lacan.com website to less scholarly appearances in *The Guardian* and so on; podcasts (from Birkbeck College and the European Graduate School), YouTube lectures and writings about his work that, again, vary in critical and journalistic quality; to, of course, Žižek memes, Žižek blogs, Žižek on Twitter, the inevitable Žižek RSA whiteboard lecture.[19]

So what? Many books are digitized, are on Google books, you can watch Judith Butler or Alain Badiou on YouTube, there are twitter accounts for Foucault, Freud, Adorno, blah blah blah. But of course part of what is exemplary (or a universal exception) about Žižek's production, his celebrity, his brand, his Barthesian mythology, if you will, is how its signification has from the start embraced such a high-low range, not merely in terms of content, but also

tone, or affect, or style. That is, if a common criticism of his celebrity is that the archetypal "reader" of Žižek is hardly a reader at all, but merely the New York gallery assistant or Berlin hipster who has watched a couple of videos and knows the catchphrases ("Žižek . . . apparently stands as the Father of Modern Hipster Thought. 'I used to work at American Apparel, and he was the only intellectual anyone had heard of'"[20]), surely the performative value of Žižek's lectures, visual signification, quasi-Tourettes tics, and so on ("not enough nose touching in this one," one YouTube commentator mentions apropos of Žižek's "Don't Just Act, Think" video)[21] possesses as much meaning as more thoughtful disquisitions on the possibilities of socialism (as other commentators offer in the same YouTube stream); or, rather, such high and low strata coexist in a way that is typical both of Žižek's own textual production *and* the blogosphere.

But where am I going with respect to the short circuit? First of all, the e-proliferation of Žižek's work in such various digital realms constitutes a way in which his texts—or their reception—can be short circuited: you don't have to pay $50 for a massive Žižek hardcover, you can download it—you don't even have to *read* the thing, you can watch a video. But this form of digital textuality also infiltrates or characterizes our own practices as researchers (or as academic readers). Today the Internet and Google books function as virtual indexes; thus, even as I own dozens of Žižek's books—multiple copies as well as various semi-legal PDFs—when trying to find a passage, I am most likely to do a Google search and/or look through digitized copies of his books.

And our own scholarly methods perhaps provide us with the flipside to Žižek's method: the reception of his work is similar not only to the conceptual writing practice of Goldsmith (who has said his books aren't meant to be read) and the "distant reading" that Franco Moretti has promulgated in his manifestos for world literature (from "Conjectures"[22] to *Graphs, Maps, Trees*[23]) but more specifically in the DH-ish practices of Ed Finn's study, which compared Amazon reviews of David Foster Wallace's novels to professional criticism, not by reading 1,000 reviews, but via "a combination of Perl scripts (to gather and groom the data), a MySQL database (to store it), and the visualization tool yEd."[24] The topic of reading is surely important, both for the practice of theory (or philosophy) and for its reception; we will shortly see how much of what we do read is in fact first read for us by other, non- or post-human readers.

The Internet Is the Obscene Underside

In the final section of this chapter, I want to turn to Žižek's theory of the obscene underside of the law as a way of understanding some of the tendencies, subcultures, practices, and textualities of the Internet. Žižek's argument is worked out in *Metastases of Enjoyment* and "Re-visioning 'Lacanian' Social Criticism: the Law and its Obscene Double." His argument is, first of all, that it is a mistake to assume the law functions as a monolithic entity: rather, it addresses us as split subjects, and there is a concomitant "gap between public

discourse and its fantasmic support."[25] This gap is due to a failure in the law—thus superego steps in, with the paradoxical demand that the law depends on its *illegal* enjoyment—the law is incomplete and must be "supplemented by a clandestine 'unwritten' code."[26] Here two points are crucial: first, we should not underestimate how that fantasmic support—the "castrated Master," as Žižek puts it, is a function of enjoyment for the masses (thus Bush's malapropisms or Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper's zombie-like lack of affect are enjoyed by their supporters—Žižek calls this the "leader with his pants down" syndrome[27])—and, second, social norms (the big Other) depend upon their transgression—illustrated in an example Žižek returns to again and again from the Rob Reiner film *A Few Good Men* (1992), where U.S. Marines kill one of their own under an unofficially sanctioned "code red."

To complete Žižek's argument as to the etiology or genealogy of the obscene underside of the law: he argues, referencing Bakhtin on carnival, that in traditional patriarchal societies the reversal of societal norms (the king is unseated by the fool, army officers serve their men on Boxing Day [a tradition in British and Canadian military], Greek women enjoy a day in the café while the men take care of the children) served the purpose of *reinforcing* those norms; then, with the coming of the Enlightenment and bourgeois-democratic society, carnivalesque transgressions take on the very totalitarianism that has been forced underground—thus the KKK, or Abu Ghraib.[28] This repression also effects a split: while we have the symbolic Law concerned with meaning, we have the superego of enjoyment, or the key support that ideology finds in enjoyment—from identification with the Nation-Thing[29] to transgression as such which tends to solidify the Law.[30]

OK, so let's turn to some Internet culture to explore this theory. From spam mail, malicious memes, LOLcats, and trolls, the Internet seems to offer any variety of trivial, malignant, offensive, but also transgressive examples of an obscene underside to the official forums of Facebook, email, Google, Amazon, and other corporate, government, or academic websites. So this is a more global or schematic claim of my chapter: that Žižek's concept of that obscene underside provides a way of understanding the stain of enjoyment that is the counterpart to the more logocentric meaning and official façade of the web. For example, LOLcats, text-, and image-based memes that spawn not only the circulation of user-generated content but also the vernacular of "LOLcat," or texting abbreviations, emoticons, and "l33tspeak"[31] function specifically via the transgressive/*jouissance* of LOL (laugh out loud), a form of Žižekian interpassivity (the acronym LOL laughs out loud—or ROFL or LMFAO—so we don't have to). Or we can consider the moral panic that has been spread in recent years about so-called trolls, who post anonymous, often vitriolic comments and images in message boards or Facebook pages. In both cases, we could argue that the obscene enjoyment of LOLcats and trolls reinforces the law.[32]

But my argument is slightly different with spam. Now, we are all familiar with spam and especially with the varieties of so-called Nigerian spam, or

emails that come from Nigeria, calling us "dear" in charmingly awkward syntax offering to send us 10 million dollars if we hold a much larger sum in our bank account. These scams, or "advance fee fraud" are oftentimes referred to as "419" fraud, after the relevant section of the Nigerian Criminal Code. While the practice goes back at least to the Spanish Prisoner con in the Elizabethan era,[33] a writer in *Slate* notes that the modern scam has its precise origin with mail fraud in Nigeria in the 1970s, first using photocopied letters, then in the 1980s fax machines, and, beginning in the 1990s but spiking ten years ago, with Internet email.[34] Indeed, the prevalence of cybercafes in Lagos and other African cities enables the scam, and, arguably, the importance of the 419 business helped build the digital infrastructure in Nigeria, much as the downloading of porn drove U.S. infrastructure in the 1990s.

The ornate linguistic indeterminacy of 419 spam is surely one of the most remarkable aspects of these digital texts: from the all-caps form of some to their melding of real and fictitious narratives, addressing the recipient, a total stranger, as "DEAR" and other apostrophes that, as one critic noted, seem straight out of an eighteenth-century protocol book:

> "It is with a heart full of hope . . ." reads one. "Compliments of the season. Grace and peace and love from this part of the Atlantic to you" is how another starts. "Goodday to you, I would here crave your distinguished indulgence" begins a third." And still another opens, "It is with my profound dignity that I write you.[35]

Now this last critic, Douglas Cruikshank, calls for a literary appreciation of the 419 spam: "[b]orn in Africa over a decade ago, a renaissance in short fiction writing is spreading across the globe via the Internet, breathing new life into the always troubled romance between art and crime." The novelist Chris Cleave has more recently written that "these missives are an unsung literary form, a river of wheedling, flattery, and grasping that flows directly from the desires of the human heart,"[36] and the Nigerian-Canadian poet Pius Adesanmi has argued that "the 419 letter now stakes a vigorous claim to an ontological identity as art."[37] Indeed, according to a rhetorical analysis[38] that drew upon a "native informant," as it were—a writer of the 419 scams—the tone of the letters relies on a very interesting postcolonial hybridity. On the one hand, their style mimics that of Nigerian soap operas, as many targets are themselves African (contradicted by other studies which claim targets are from North America and Europe); on the other hand, "'I was told to write like a classic novelist would,' Taiwo explained. 'Very old world, very thick sentences, you know?'"[39] Finally, in a dynamic, if not dialogic, relationship, the language and actual lexicon of this and most spam presumes two sets of readers: both the human reader and the various spam filtering programs, which rely on a form of Baysean probability logic (judging whether to block an email depending on what "tokens"—words, URLs, colors, etc.—it has that resemble either legitimate email [so-called "ham"] or spam).[40]

How does Žižek help here? A well-known precept of Lacanian theory is that "the letter always arrives at its destination." Formulated in his seminar on Poe's "Purloined Letter" (indeed it is the concluding line of the essay), Lacan's precept plays on the three meanings of the letter: the missive, the orthographic symbol, and the liberal arts. In *Enjoy Your Symptom!* Žižek argues that for Lacan, the letter's "true addressee is namely not the empirical other which may receive it or not, but the big Other, the symbolic order itself [the Internet?], which receives it *the moment the letter is put into circulation,* i.e., the moment the sender 'externalizes' his message, delivers it to the Other, the moment the Other takes cognizance of the letter and thus disburdens the sender of responsibility for it."[41] Further, and this should bring to mind for us what I discussed earlier with respect to the obscene underside of the Law and the relationship between meaning and pleasure:

> When the letter arrives at its destination, the stain spoiling the picture is not abolished, effaced: what we are forced to grasp is, on the contrary, the fact that the real "message," the real letter awaiting us is the stain itself. We should perhaps reread Lacan's "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" from this aspect: is not the letter itself ultimately such a stain—not a signifier but rather an object resisting symbolization, a surplus, a material leftover circulating among the subjects and staining its momentary possessor?[42]

Surely that stain can refer to the excesses of literary and generic signification in the Nigerian spam as well as to such signifiers as "p3nis" or words embedded in jpegs, but also "a material leftover circulating among the subjects" *qua* subject lines of the email themselves. That is, and here we can adjudge ourselves based on the various human and non-human readings: baroque literary qualities, poor or non-native speakers, or Baysean probability of spam, are no doubt "the real letter."

Conclusions

I began this chapter arguing that in some ways Žižek *does not write his books* but they are instead merely nodes in a network—then, that we can be the most faithful of readers if we *do not read Žižek* and yet perhaps plagiarize his ideas—and finally, that this *obscene underside* of the Internet is itself paradigmatic not only of the return of the letter to its sender, to he who does not write—Žižek—but also to we who do not read. Which is to argue, really, that the short circuit contained in Žižek's books—and which contains them—necessitate both the return to Lacan that I make here and also, perhaps, to Marx. For while recent scandals and texts, from WikiLeaks to *The Black Code*,[43] indicate that what happens on the Internet doesn't stay on the Internet—not only do we need Žižek to understand the Internet, but we need the Internet to understand Žižek.

Notes

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3. Žižek, "Melancholy," 657, *Totalitarianism,* 141.
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7. See also Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham, "Slavoj Žižek: Philosopher, Cultural Critic, and Cyber-Communist." *jac* 21, no. 2 (2001): 254–255.
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14. Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality* (London: Verso, 2005), 66.
15. Slavoj Žižek, "How to Begin from the Beginning," *New Left Review* 57 (May-June 2009): 54.
16. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits,* trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 685.
17. Žižek, *Sublime,* 104.
18. David Scott Kastan, "From Codex to Computer; or, Presence of Mind," *Shakespeare and the Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 111–136.
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36. Chris Cleave. Review of *I Do Not Come to You by Chance,* by Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani. *Washington Post.* May 23, 2009. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/22/AR2009052203329.html. Nwaubani's novel, along with the Canadian novel *419*, offer more explicitly literary versions of spam.

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The Real Internet[1]

By Jodi Dean

At first glance, Slavoj Žižek's writings on cyberspace from the late 1990s don't hold up. The primary problem is the separation of cyberspace, or virtual reality, from the communicative exchanges that are part of everyday life in real capitalism. When Žižek wrote these pieces, computer-mediated interactions seemed to be on their way to constituting a new, separate reality that people might "jack into" (William Gibson had already supplied a compelling term for this cybernetic space in his 1984 novel, *Neuromancer*). Nineties theorists of technoculture, virtual reality, and cyberspace focused on the lawlessness of this new realm, particularly on the ways its anonymous, real-time, textual interface facilitated identity play and sexual experimentation.[2] That cyberspace was considered a separate domain let Žižek treat it not only as a world with its own dynamics, but more fundamentally as a specific sociocultural symptom. Thus, much as the neuroses of Freud's hysterics provided a point of access into the pathologies of bourgeois modernity, so did the psychotic character of virtual communities enable Žižek to begin theorizing the decline of symbolic efficiency constitutive of the "postmodern constellation."[3] My intent here is to reconsider Žižek's early account of cyberspace in light of the intensifications of communicative capitalism. What appear as glitches, I argue, open up the possibility of theorizing the Internet as Real. Networked media's capture of subjects follows the circular movement of the drives.

One

Žižek populates his cyberspace essays with figures now stereotypic in press accounts of the Internet. For example, in "Quantum Physics with Lacan" (a chapter in *The Indivisible Remainder*, 1996), he invokes the adolescent whose compulsive computer play indexes a profound change in desire as such: a "relationship to an 'inhuman partner' is slowly emerging which is, in an uncanny

way, more fulfilling than the relationship to a sexual partner."[4] Žižek also emphasizes identity play in virtual communities, positioning such experimentation as perhaps the most fascinating aspect of networked communications. Online, I can be anybody. And I can change who I am at any time. Žižek extends these ideas in "Cyberspace, or the Unbearable Closure of Being," published the following year (in *Plague of Fantasies*). Reiterating the problem of knowledge presented by computer-mediated interaction—is the other before me on the screen real or a program? Is the identity the other presents true or does it enact a kind of fantasy?—Žižek focuses this essay on the dissolution of three key boundaries of separation, those between the natural and the artificial, reality and its appearance, and the self and its others.[5]

Even if one agrees with Žižek's account of the way cyberspace brought to the fore a set of ambiguities that have always troubled the subject, the moment when these questions are the most pressing ones has clearly passed. The name of that passing is Web 2.0. Despite its overdetermination as a term trying too hard to renew the enthusiasm of the dotcom years by grouping together blogs, social network sites, photo sharing, video sharing, remixes, mash-ups, and other activities of users not just generating content but making and distributing new applications, Web 2.0 designates nonetheless the surprising truth of computer-mediated interactions: the return of the human.[6] Differently put, the matter of the Internet has less to do with bits, screens, code, protocol, and fiber-optic cables than it does with people.[7]

Precisely insofar as Web 2.0 marks the return of humans to networked information and communication technology, Žižek's work—inclusive of the early discussions of cyberspace—remains indispensible to critical theories of new media. As I demonstrate in *Publicity's Secret* (2002), his Lacanian-Marxist version of ideology critique helps clarify the way networked communications materialize a particular version of publicity construed in terms of the debating public presupposed by ideals of participatory democracy. I refer to this formation as communicative capitalism. Žižek's discussions of fantasy, fetishism, and the decline of symbolic efficiency are crucial components of my account.

The latter concept is particularly vital to critical media theory insofar as it designates the fundamental uncertainty accompanying the impossibility of totalization.[8] The contemporary setting of electronically mediated subjectivity is one of infinite doubt and ultimate reflexivization. There is always another option, link, opinion, nuance, or contingency that we haven't taken into account, some particular experience of some other who could be potentially damaged or disenfranchised, a better deal, perhaps even a cure. Isn't the very way we are posing our questions already a problem? What about the suppositions and closures already informing our thought, our language, our grammar? The very conditions of possibility for adequation (for determining the criteria by which to assess whether a decision or answer is, if not good, then at least adequate) have been foreclosed. Žižek uses Lacan to express the point as a decline of the master and the suspension of the classical function of the

Master-Signifier: there is no longer a Master-Signifier that stabilizes meaning, that knits together the chain of signifiers and hinders their tendencies to float off into indeterminacy.[9] Whereas the absence of such a master might seem to produce a situation of complete openness and freedom—no authority is telling the subject what to do, what to desire, how to structure its choices—Žižek argues that in fact, the result is unbearable, suffocating closure.[10] Without criteria for choosing, one loses the sense that one need bother choosing at all.

Although Žižek develops his discussion of the decline of symbolic efficiency in *The Ticklish Subject* (1999), extending it from virtual communities into late capitalism more generally, the idea emerges in the early essays on cyberspace. In both of the aforementioned pieces, Žižek emphasizes the virtuality of the symbolic. This emphasis distinguishes Žižek's discussion of cyberspace from other ones circulating in nineties media theory. The functioning of the Master-Signifier depends on virtuality. It works not as just another element in a chain, but as something that is more than itself, something present as potential. Žižek draws an example from Freud: the threat of castration has, itself, castrating effects.[11] Cyberspace threatens *this* virtuality. The paradox: cyberspace is not virtual enough.

Žižek considers several ways computer-mediated interaction threatens virtuality. One is the loss of the binding power or performative efficacy of words. Words are no longer "subjectivized" insofar as they fail to induce the subject to stand by them.[12] At any moment, the visitor to cyberspace can simply "unhook" himself.[13] Since exit is an option with nearly no costs, subjects lose incentives for their words to be their bonds. A second, more fundamental, threat involves the dissolution of the boundary between fantasy and reality, a dissolution affecting identity and desire. Insofar as digital environments enable the realization of fantasies on the textual screen, they close the gaps between the subject's symbolic identity and its fantasmic background.[14] Instant gratification fills in the lack constitutive of desire. Hypertextual play enables the unstated subtext of any text to be brought to the fore, thereby eliminating the textual effects of the unsaid. Put somewhat differently, fantasies that are completely realized cease to be fantasies.[15] A repercussion of this filling-in is a third threat, a threat to meaning. The gap of signification, the minimal difference that makes some item or answer significant, that makes it "feel right" or "the one" dissipates. But instead of eliminating the space of doubt, the filling-in occasions the loss of the possibility of certainty. Žižek asks, "Is not one of the possible reactions to the excessive filling-in of the voids in cyberspace therefore *informational anorexia*, the desperate refusal to accept information, in so far as it occludes the presence of the Real?"[16] The feast of information results in a more fundamental starvation as one loses the sense of an underlying Real.

All three threats—to performativity, desire, and meaning—indicate cyberspace's foreclosure of the symbolic (the elimination of the space of the signifier as it slides into the Real, which thereby itself loses the capacity to appear as Real). Žižek treats this foreclosure of the symbolic in the terms of paranoid

psychosis: the Other is both missing and fully, overwhelmingly present.[17] Yet, he doesn't presume the subject's absorption in the imaginary *jouissance* of a pre-Oedipal primal oneness. Žižek is careful to note that such an image of friction-free immersion is "cyberspace capitalism's" own ideological fantasy, a fantasy of a society without antagonism. What's at stake, then, is post-Oedipal, an order that doesn't rely on a Master Signifier holding together the chain of significations.[18] In this order, the Real presence of the Other is lost as the lack in the Other is filled in. The something extra, the inexpressible mystery or *objet a* that makes the Other Real is subsumed by one who is "*over-present*, bombarding me with the torrential flow of images and explicit statements of her (or his) most secret fantasies."[19] Thus, correlative to the absence of the Real Other are the unbearable intrusions of the Other's *jouissance*.

The central insight of Žižek's early work on cyberspace involves the change to the symbolic. Žižek argues that the gaps in the symbolic (the gaps that enable access to the Real insofar as the Real cannot be approached directly) are filled in (saturating "the virtual space of symbolic fiction").[20] The result is a situation of nondesire, nonmeaning, and the unbearable intrusion of enjoyment.

Two

Friedrich Kittler begins *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* with optical fiber networks in order to get to an end: "Before the end, something is coming to an end."[21] The end is an end of differentiation, more specifically, the differentiation between image, text, and voice. Digitization brings it about: "Instead of wiring people and technologies, absolute knowledge will be an endless loop."[22]

Kittler treats the distinctions between image, text, and voice in terms of the Lacanian registers of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real.[23] Lacan's registers, he tells us, are in fact an historical effect of changes in storage technologies. The Imaginary consists in the cuts and illusions that comprise fantasies of wholeness, be they before the mirror or on the screen. The Symbolic is typing, the machinic word in all its technicity. The Real is recorded sound, inclusive of the hisses and noise accompanying the vocals produced by a larynx. Digitization erases the distinctions between visual, written, and acoustic media. It turns all data into numbers that can be stored, transmitted, copied, computed, and rearranged. Taking the place of the material differences providing the basic structure of Lacanian psychoanalysis is the feedback loop. Kittler writes, "A simple feedback loop—and information machines bypass humans, their so-called inventors. Computers themselves become subjects."[24]

Leaving to the side—for now—the loops and knots characteristic of Lacan's later work on drive and the Real, I want to note an initial correspondence between Žižek and Kittler. Even as Žižek emphasizes cyberspace and Kittler digitization (as well as algorithms, hardware, and fiber optic cables), of concern to each is a change in the status of the word, of the function of the symbolic and its separation from the imaginary and the Real.[25] Each emphasizes the

radically totalizing effects of information technologies: *all* information will be digitized; *all* knowledge will circulate in optical fiber networks; "the whole of reality will be 'digitalized.'"[26] Yet, whereas Kittler evokes the end of "so-called man" as humanity is disintegrated and reconfigured in the codes and computations of machinic circuits, Žižek argues that some dimension of humans-in-bodies persists as a "remainder of the real" that resists virtualization.[27] That is to say, rather than construing digitization in terms of "its capacity to inscribe the real entirely independently of any interface with the human," Žižek suggests instead a transcription or "redoubling" of reality in the "big Other" of cyberspace.[28] This redoubling will necessarily remain tied to human embodiment. Or, differently put, not only does the Real exceed its inscriptions, but this excess cannot be uncoupled from human experience and persistence: its most fundamental dimensions remain inhuman and unconscious.

Three

Mark Hansen's *New Philosophy for New Media* endeavors to rescue human beings from Kittler's radical antihumanism. Hansen approaches the problem via embodiment, more specifically via a notion of affectivity he develops by retrieving Bergson from his appropriation by Deleuze. Important for my discussion here is less Hansen's critique of Deleuze than his use of Deleuze against Kittler.

Hansen's argument focuses on the image. He writes: "Kittler's concept of digital convergence yields a theory of the *obsolescence of the image*—a radical suspension of the image's (traditional) function to interface the real (information) with the human sensory apparatus."[29] As digitization turns all media into numbers, it changes their hold on the reality of the empirical world. Technical images, images comprised of numbers, can be altered all the way down; there is no longer a persisting materiality that links the image to its ostensible source. The digital image is just a "virtual block of information."[30] Hansen points out that the very term "digital image" is oxymoronic insofar as it reaffirms the divisions between optics, acoustics, and writing that the digital ostensibly undercuts,[31] divisions that are connected to embodied sensory persons. In contrast to Kittler, Deleuze analyzes digitization as a modification of the time-image that institutes a new mode of framing. Hansen explains, "specifically, it resituates the source of the virtual from the interstices between (series of) images to interstices *within* the image itself. In a sense, it *incorporates* the virtual within the actual."[32] Technical flexibility does not eliminate the aesthetic challenge of framing the virtual, a challenge that Hansen reads as pointing to human experience rather than remaining trapped in fiber-optic cables.

Even as Hansen's discussion of the image installs some healthy indeterminacy into Kittler's techno-determinism, there are two problems with his endeavor to rehumanize the digital with an appeal to the body. The first concerns the link between information and meaning. The second concerns the distinction between the eye and the gaze.

In his critique, Hansen charges Kittler with radicalizing Claude Shannon's separation of meaning from information.[33] As an alternative, Hansen offers Donald McKay's account wherein information "is necessarily correlated with meaning."[34] McKay's supplement to Shannon accentuates the role of the receiver of information. The receiver is part of the context determining what information is selected in a given situation. Not surprisingly, Hansen highlights embodiment as it affects the way the receiver frames or selects information. But his criticisms miss their target: he doesn't say why the receiver would be a human rather than a machine (not to mention multiple machines). Machine language doesn't depend on meaning; signals aren't necessarily signifiers.

Additionally, Hansen's attempt to anchor meaning in embodiment leads him to understate the impact of the eclipse of meaning in the decline of symbolic efficiency. He proceeds as if individual embodied experiences could overcome structural undecideability.[35] *Contra* Hansen, a symbol is not primarily an element of an individual receiver's internal activity of generating symbolic structures.[36] Symbolization as such is intersubjective, given to and impressed upon the subject in and through language. Patterns of information come from without; they configure human embodiment rather than emerge "embryo-genetically."[37] Counterintuitively, Hansen's embodied account of meaning is almost more effective at uncoupling communication from information than Kittler's cybernetic machines: an outgrowth of internal processes of an organism, "meaning" is originally non-communicable, specific to the embodied experience of the individual receiver.

In focusing on the receiver, Hansen relies on a model of communication in terms of sender-message-response. Under communicative capitalism, however, this model fails to account for the vast majority of communicative utterances.[38] Uncoupled from contexts of action and application—as on the Internet or in print and broadcast media—the message is part of a circulating data stream. To this extent, it is better understood as a contribution rather than a message at all. Its particular content doesn't matter—*did I forward a photo of kitten or news of a scandal*? Who sends it doesn't matter. *Did I link to a blog post or did a crawler find it and dump it on a splog*? And, who receives a contribution doesn't matter—*the 36 of my Facebook friends who happened to check their newsfeeds within an hour of my update? The thousands who happen upon a particular video on YouTube?* What matters in this setting is circulation, the addition to the pool. Any particular contribution remains secondary to the fact of circulation. I should add that the value of any particular contribution is likewise inversely proportionate to the openness, inclusiveness, or extent of a circulating data stream: the more opinions or comments that are out there, the less of an impact any given one will make. Hansen's turn to the receiver occludes this contemporary media ecology wherein the use value of a message, and hence its reception by an individual receiver, is less important than its exchange value, its circulation within a larger flow of contributions. A contribution need not be understood; it need only be repeated, reproduced,

forwarded, archived. Circulation—Kittler's endless loop—is the setting for the acceptance or rejection of a contribution.

I turn now to the second set of problems in Hansen's *New Philosophy for New Media*, problems centering on the distinction between the eye and the gaze. His two gestures to the Lacanian conception of anamorphosis enable me to frame my discussion. In what he presents as a radicalization of anamorphosis, Hansen provides a gripping discussion of a crucial scene in Ridley Scott's 1982 film, *Blade Runner*. The scene features the Esper machine, a contraption that moves and sounds almost like a ventilator and functions as a kind of photographic enlarger and printer. Rick Deckerd (Harrison Ford) vocally instructs the machine to zoom and pan so as to bring out a detail deeply hidden in the image. Yet, as Hansen emphasizes, the perspective of this machine is impossible. An enlarged photograph could never produce the hidden detail; the detail is an impossible object (*objet petit a*) that must be from elsewhere, from some deep three-dimensional data space the very impossibility of which makes it more Real than the two dimensional photographic image ever could be.

To be sure, this is not quite how Hansen puts it. Rather, he writes, "With this deterritorialization of reference, we reach the scenario presented in the scene from *Blade Runner*—the moment when a computer can 'see' in a way profoundly liberated from the optical, perspectival and temporal conditions of human vision."[39] For Hansen, the computer's liberation from the optical renders its data space an anamorphic distortion far more radical than the oblique stain in *The Ambassadors*. The stain in *The Ambassadors* is "resolved from the standpoint of another *single* perspective." In contrast, *Blade Runner* confronts us with "a multiply distorted technical mediation that requires the abandoning of *any particular perspectival anchoring* for its resolution."[40] The vision of the machine dissolves human vision's connection to the world. Because his project is building a theory of embodied perception, Hansen has to grapple with this cut between machinic and human perception. The remainder of the chapter in which the gesture to *Blade Runner* occurs takes up this task.

Hansen could have avoided the initial severing of human from mechanical vision had he considered the gaze. The "impossibility" of the film's photographic machine isn't specific to the machine. Rather, it is an irreducible element of the gaze, the fact that the inclusion of the spectator in the visual field ruptures the field. Hansen, however, construes vision in terms of "optical, perspectival, and temporal conditions" instead of allowing for the gaze beyond appearance.[41] In effect, the very embodied subject Hansen wishes to defend is missing from its own picture! Put somewhat differently, the gaze as the object of scopic drive is a point of irresolution, not an error of perspective or visual mistake. To treat it as such a mistake is to affirm an empirical given as if were complete rather than disrupted by the Real.

Hansen's second discussion of anamorphosis also involves skulls, namely, a 2000 sculptural installation by Robert Lazzarini conveniently entitled *skulls*

and exhibited at the Whitney's Bitstreams show. Hansen tries to reproduce the experience of the work for his readers:

> At each effort to align your point of view with the perspective of one of these weird sculptural objects, you experience a gradually mounting feeling of incredible strangeness. It is as though these skulls refuse to return your gaze, or better, as though they existed in a space without any connection to the space you are inhabiting, a space from which they simply cannot look back at you. And yet they *are* looking at you, just as surely as *you* are looking at *them*![42]

Although other commentators on *skulls* have emphasized anamorphosis and the work's evocation of *The Ambassadors*, Hansen argues that anamorphosis is in fact not at stake in the work at all. Why? Because the skulls "do not resolve into a normal image when viewed from an oblique angle, but confront the viewer with the projection of a warped space . . ."[43] For Hansen, what makes visual space "normal" for the human spectator is resolution, the correction of perspectival distortion.[44] As my discussion of Lacan indicates, however, the notion of the gaze reminds us that "what one looks at is what cannot be seen."[45] The object of the gaze is *objet a*, the impossible object anchoring and disrupting the subject. Lazzarini's *skulls* thus exemplifies the "strange contingency" of the gaze, its traumatic impact on the subject who feels itself being seen. Lacan explains, "The world is all-seeing, but it is not exhibitionistic—it does not provoke our gaze. When it begins to provoke it, the feeling of strangeness begins too."[46] Hansen evokes this strangeness, associating it with the gaze even as he resists this insight in pursuit of his account of embodied perception.

Hansen's critique of Kittler pushes him to consider the virtual within the image, that is, within the visual field. For him, this virtuality provokes a confrontation because the spectator's perspective is "normally" resolved. A proper theory of affectivity, he suggests, can help make sense of how embodied humans live with new media. For Hansen, the return of the human is the return of embodiment, as well as of a certain aesthetic relation to the sensorium. In contrast, I've argued that the visual field of the subject is necessarily ruptured by the gaze. The gaze marks a gap of irreducible irresolution, of the subject's presence in what it sees. This introduction of the gaze, moreover, clicks on the impossible kernel of the Real, of the inhuman object of scopic drive, inseparable from the human and hence inseparable from the human's return.

Four

Although Hansen omits the gaze from his account, my discussion thus far suggests its unavoidability, its persistence as a stain in the visual field, a stain that distorts even as it supports our embodied seeing. The gaze also disrupts the other aspect of Hansen's argument I mentioned, his attempt to reconnect

information and meaning. A return to the idea of the decline of symbolic efficiency helps clarify this point.

In a first instance, one might be tempted to think of the gaze as that of an Other "who registers my acts in the symbolic network."[47] Such an Other provides the subject with an ego ideal, a point of symbolic identification. The gaze qua ego ideal is the point from which one sees one's actions as valuable and worthwhile, as making sense. Žižek argues that this gaze is a crucial supposition for the subject's capacity to act; hence, the decline of symbolic efficiency is necessarily accompanied by the breakdown in capacities for action. Absent the gaze of an ego ideal, one may feel trapped, passive, or unsure as to the point of doing anything at all. To this extent, identifying with this gaze enables the subject's activity.

Such a gaze structures our relations to our practices. For example, instead of experiencing the state as myriad forms and organizations, branches and edicts, presences and regulations, in our daily activities we may assume that the state is a singular entity, a Big Brother watching what we are doing. Similarly, we may presuppose an enemy assessing our every action—a devious colleague? Envious neighbor? Jealous lover? Or we may imagine how we would appear in the eyes of someone we admire—the priest who would find us saintly, the professor who would admire our brilliance, the poor unfortunates who would hail us for our heroism. The point is that through symbolic identification the subject posits the very entity to which it understands itself as responding. How it imagines this other will be crucial to the kinds of activities the subject can undertake.

Weirdly, then, the active subject has to posit a kind of passivity, that is, a passive Other before whom it appears. The subject has to imagine itself, in other words, as fascinating this Other, as doing something or saying something or even watching something that captivates it. As Žižek emphasizes, the gaze is thus reflexive, doubled insofar as the subject sees itself being seen. The one who is captivated already is the subject.

Although the subject needs to posit a gaze in order to understand its acts as registering, there is something disturbing about the gaze, something foreign and excessive, unchosen and unwanted. Žižek writes that "in the case of the gaze, the point to which the subject makes himself seen retains its traumatic heterogeneity and nontransparency, it remains an object in a strict Lacanian sense, not a symbolic feature."[48] In a setting of multiply interlinked media, say, we are never quite certain to what we have made ourselves visible. We don't know who is looking at us or how they are looking. We can't even be sure whether there is a single or multiple perspectives. Who is lurking on my blog? What databases am I in? Who has googled me and why? The lure of the Internet is not simply the paranoid's desire for a big Other behind the scenes. Rather, it resides in the gaps, holes, and uncertainties around which we circulate.

This disturbing uncertainty thus points to the second, more traumatic version of the gaze, the gaze not as the big Other of the ego ideal but as the object of the drive. In this version, the gaze refers to the subject's entrapment in the field of the visible: "I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides."[49] What one sees is always incomplete, in need of being filled in. Yet, this filling-in necessarily brings with it inadequacies and distortions. The subject might insert what it wants to see; its desire may fill in the gaps it encounters. It may then become aware of such a gap, and its involvement in it, feeling itself somehow seen, even vulnerable. Each side of this relation to the gap (to a lure or stain in the visible field)—the side of seeing it and of being seen seeing it—is an aspect of the gaze. Copjec's reading of Freud is one of the best accounts of this gaze as the object of scopic drive. Freud's argument, she explains,

> distinguishes the act of looking at oneself through the intermediary of an *alien object* from the act of looking at oneself through an *alien person*. The first concerns that reflexive circuit by which one apprehends oneself in the categories of the culture to which one belongs or of someone one wishes to please, with the result that one thereby regards oneself as a known or knowable object. The second concerns a completely different kind of circuit, that of the active-passive drive, which turns around on itself. In this case, because I do not expose myself to the look of a determinate other, I do not receive a message back regarding my determinate identity. The reflexive circuit of scopic drive does not produce a *knowable object*; it produces a *transgression of the pleasure principle*, by forcing a hole in it. The scopic drive produces an exorbitant pleasure that disrupts the ego identity formed by the first circuit.[50]

I once thought I saw the postman sitting in his delivery truck cuddling a puppy. This seemed strange. A second glance revealed that he was sorting letters and that there was no puppy. I immediately felt oddly embarrassed, even rather ashamed. It was almost as if there were a gaze in the postman-(missing) puppy complex that saw me see myself making this bizarre mistake. It felt like I was caught not just making the mistake but realizing, becoming aware of, the mistake. In Lacan's words, "Generally speaking, the relation between the gaze and what one wishes to see involves a lure. The subject is not presented as other than he is, and what one shows him is not what he wishes to see."[51] The gaze of scopic drive, then, refers not to a specific person whom one imagines being seen by but rather to a more unsettling feeling of an excess disturbing one's seeing, both in terms of what one sees and in one's being seen.

In communicative capitalism, the gaze to which one makes oneself visible is a point hidden in an opaque and heterogeneous network. It is not the gaze of the symbolic other of our ego ideal but the more disturbing, traumatic gaze of a gap or excess, *objet petit a*. Our disclosures are surveilled, archived, remembered, in ways that exceed our ability to manage or control. On the one hand, this is the source of their immense attraction, what lures us in, what incites us

to practices of revelation and display. On the other, the media practices that invite us to create and express, to offer our thoughts, feelings, and opinions *freely*, to participate (but in what?) deliver us up to the use and enjoyment of others.

Because one is never sure how one is seen, one is never certain of one's place in the symbolic order. How, exactly, are we being looked at? One never really knows who one is—despite all the cameras, files, media, and databases. Facebook tries to help us out with this by supplying endless quizzes that promise to tell us who we really are—which *Lord of the* Rings character, which famous philosopher, which month. It's almost as if Facebook is trying to let us see ourselves as alien objects again or like we return, again and again, to Facebook as a way of avoiding alien persons. But we can't—not really. We already know that a celebrity gamer in one place is elsewhere just another kid. A famous jazz musician may have zero name recognition among economists. Someone with a million followers on Twitter may be no one at all to the rest of us. Who one is in the sociosymbolic order is uncertain—and ever changing. The order is never fixed; it is in constant flux. The term for this flux and uncertainty is the decline in symbolic efficiency.

Five

To emphasize the decline of symbolic efficiency is to emphasize a retreat or effacement in the law of desire and an amplification of the logic of drive.

Desire and drive each designate a way that the subject relates to enjoyment. Desire is always a desire to desire, a desire that can never be filled, a desire for a *jouissance* that can never be attained. In contrast, drive attains *jouissance* in the repetitive process of not reaching it. Failure (or the thwarting of the aim) provides its own sort of success. Desire is like the path of an arrow; drive is like the course of the boomerang. What is fundamental at the level of the drive, Lacan teaches, is "the movement outwards and back in which it is structured."[52] Through this repetitive movement outward and back, the subject can miss his object but still achieve his aim; the subject can "find satisfaction in the very circular movement of repeatedly missing its object."[53] Because failure produces enjoyment, because the subject enjoys via repetition, drive captures the subject. Žižek writes, "Drive is something in which the subject is caught, a kind of acephalous force which persists in its repetitive movement."[54]

Žižek explains the difference between desire and drive via a change in the position and function of *objet a.* He writes:

> Although, in both cases, the link between object and loss is crucial, in the case of the *objet a* as the object of *desire*, we have an object [that] was originally lost, [that] coincides with its own loss, [that] emerges as lost, while, in the case of the *objet a* as the object of drive, the "object" *is directly the loss itself*—in the shift from desire to drive, we pass from the *lost object* to *loss itself as an object*. That is to say,

> the weird movement called "drive" is not driven by the "impossible" quest for the lost object; it is *a push to directly enact the "loss"—the gap, cut, distance—itself* .[55]

Drive is a kind of compulsion or force, a force that is shaped, that takes its form and pulsion, from loss. Drive is loss as a force or the force loss exerts on the field of desire. Differently put, it's the compulsive shape of networked media as they enact the loss of symbolic efficiency. To be clear, this enactment is neither an effort to restore the symbolic nor to replace the phallic signifier. Rather, it's the "extraordinarily plastic" movement of the drives, to borrow Freud's expression. Freud continues, "They may appear in each others' places. One of them may accumulate the intensity of the other."[56]

That the drive is thwarted or sublimated means that it reaches it goal by other means, through other objects. Blocked in one direction, it splits into multiple vectors, into a network. If Freud views the process as akin to the flow of water into multiple tributaries and canals, we might also think of it as an acephalic power's attempt to constitute and reach its objects by any means necessary.

Lacan emphasizes that the drives are partial drives. He specifies this idea as "partial with regard to the biological finality of sexuality."[57] I understand the point to refer to the variety of changing, incomplete, and dispersed ways subjects enjoy. It's not the case that drives develop in a linear fashion from infant to adult.[58] Rather, they fragment and disperse as they satisfy themselves via a variety of objects. As Copjec writes, "It is as if the very function of the drive were this continuous opening up of small fractures between things."[59] Her language here is precise: the fractures are not of things but between them; the parts that are objects of the drives are not parts of wholes but parts that appear in the force of loss as new expressions of a whole (she uses Deleuze's example of the role of the close-up as a cinematic device: it's not part of a scene enlarged; rather, it's an expression of the whole of the scene).[60] Lacan refers to the partial object as an object of lack, an object that emerges in the void of the drive to provide the subject with satisfaction.

The last aspect of the conception of drive I want to emphasize is correlative to the part, namely, montage. Lacan conceives the montage of drive in the sense of surrealist collage; there is a constant jumping without transition between heterogeneous elements.[61] Montage suggests movement without message, movement with intensity, movement outward and back. Disparate images and sounds shift and mutate without beginning or end, head or tail. Lacan says, "I think the resulting image would show the working of a dynamo connected up to a gas-tap, a peacock's feather emerges and tickles the belly of a pretty woman, who is just lying there looking beautiful."[62] More contemporary ways to understand montage might be mash-ups, samples, and remixes—or, our movement through contemporary communication and entertainment networks: I enter, I click, I link, I poke. Drive circulates, round and round, producing satisfaction even as it misses its aim, even as it emerges in the plastic network of the decline of symbolic efficiency.

Six

Žižek's early work on cyberspace emphasizes the loss of virtuality as the gaps in the symbolic are filled. The circulation of contributions in the networks of communicative capitalism suggests a different structure, one characterized by drive. There is no cyberspace that persists as its own domain. Rather, the networks of global communications connect through a variety of devices, technologies, and media—Internet, mobile phones, television, global positioning systems, game platforms, and the like. One of the more interesting features of massive multiplayer online role-playing games is the intersecting of game and non-game worlds: players can buy and trade currencies and characters outside the game space. The expansions and intensifications of networked interactions thus point not to a field closed to meaning, as all possibilities are explored and filled-in, but rather back to the non-all Real of human interaction.

In his later work, Žižek supplements the "Lacanian account of the Real as that which 'always returns to its place'—as that which remains the same in all possible (symbolic) universes."[63] He adds the notion of a parallax Real, that is, a Real capable of accounting for the multiplicity of appearances of the same underlying Real. Such a parallax Real is a gap or shift between perspectives. It does not embody a substantial point of information or sensory perception (*you feel it in your gut; I feel it in my bones*). Rather, it is the shift from one perspective to another. The Real, then, does not refer to what is the same but to the "hard bone of contention [that] pulverizes the sameness into the multitude of appearances."[64] It is retroactively posited as the necessary yet impossible cause of this very multiplicity. Thus, there are two aspects to the parallax Real: multiplicity and its impossible core, a "purely virtual, actually nonexistent X."[65]

Such a notion of a parallax Real is well suited to communicative capitalism. What appears is multiplicity, pulverization, the constant and repeated assertion of something else, something different. Yet, to the extent that the shifts of perspective appear immediately (without interpretation, meaning, elevation to the status of a universal) they obscure the fact of contention, as if the shifts were among a multitude of singularities each with its own perspective, none of which is more powerful, more structural, or more true than another (an example from the United States is the way that conservatives accuse liberals of racism when liberals argue for racial diversity in political appointments). What is obscured is the underlying gap or disavowal, the virtual X of fundamental antagonism. The multiplicity of shifts effaces their embeddedness in capitalism, more specifically, the communicative capitalism that makes their expression possible. If the Real is ultimately impossible, then it names the obstacle we come up against in our supposition and experience of reality. In communicative capitalism, that obstacle is the (missing) efficiency of the symbolic.

The Real of the Internet is the circulatory movement of drive—the repeated making, uploading, sampling, the constant pulverization that occurs as movement on the Internet doubles itself, becoming itself and its record or

trace—effected by symbolic efficiency as loss. The movement from link to link, the forwarding and storing and commenting, the contributing without expectation of response but in hope of further movement (why else count page views?) is circulation for its own sake. Drive's circulation forms a loop. The empty space within it, then, is not the result of the loss of something that was there before and now is missing. The drive of the Internet is not around the missing Master-Signifier (which is foreclosed rather than missing). Instead, it is the inside of the loop, the space of nothing that the loop makes appear. This endless loop that persists for its own sake is the difference that makes a difference between so-called old and new media. Old media sought to deliver messages. New media just circulates.

Understanding this circulation via drive enables us to grasp how we are captured in its loop, how the loop ensnares. First, we enjoy failure. Insofar as the aim of the drive is not to reach its goal but to enjoy, we enjoy our endless circulation, our repetitive loop. We cannot know certainly; we cannot know adequately.[66] But we can mobilize this loss, googling, checking Wikipedia, mistrusting it immediately, losing track of what we are doing, going somewhere else. We are captured because we enjoy. Second, we are captured in our passivity; in the absence of an ego ideal, we remain passive. The information age is an age wherein we lack the information we need to act. Moreover, as communicative capitalism incites continuous search for information, it renders information perpetually out of reach.

The gaze draws us to a third way we are captured in contemporary communication networks. Because the gaps are not filled, because they cannot be filled, we are drawn to them, inscribing ourselves in the images we see, the texts that we read. So although online interactions might initially appear as so many ways that we search for ourselves, trying to know who we are, to pull together our fragmented identities, the other aspect of the gaze, its traumatic disruption of the image, is perhaps even more crucial. I can approach the same idea from a different direction: the satisfaction provided by identifying with a group also arises from transgressing the group's expectations. Scary zombie pop-ups spliced into conventional YouTube videos illustrate this point. Just as the viewer has become absorbed in the video, perhaps searching for the ghost or the key to the magic trick, a monstrous image (usually accompanied by a hideous scream) shocks her out of her absorption, reminding her that, in a way, the fault is hers—she shouldn't have been wasting her time watching videos online, shouldn't have let her guard down, shouldn't have presumed that the video images had a flow independent of her investment in them.

Although my discussion of drive draws heavily from Žižek, there is a difference. Žižek emphasizes that the "stuckness" of drive (what I've been treating as capture) is the intrusion of radical break or imbalance: "drive is quite literally *the very 'drive' to break the All of continuity in which we are embedded*, to introduce a radical imbalance into it."[67] My argument is that communicative capitalism is a formation that relies on this imbalance, on the repeated suspension of

narratives, patterns, identities, norms, etc. Under conditions of the decline of symbolic efficiency, drive is not an act; it does not break out of a set of given expectations because such sets no longer persist as coherent enchainments of meaning. On the contrary, the circulation of drive is functional for the prevention of such enchainments, enchainments that might well enable radical political opposition. The contemporary challenge, then, is producing the conditions of possibility for breaking out of or redirecting the loop of drive.

Notes

1. I am grateful to Justin Clemens and Dominic Pettman for their critical remarks on an initial draft of this essay.
2. For an overview that emphasizes the debate over subjectivity, identity, and the body, see Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002). To be sure, these were not the only approaches taken to networked media; however, they were crucial steps for humanities scholars' rejection of the assumption that computers were necessarily tools of control and alienation rather than opportunities for transgression and creativity.
3. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (New York: Verso, 1999).
4. Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: On Schelling and Related Matters* (New York: Verso, 1996), 193.
5. Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York: Verso, 1997), 134.
6. As will become clear, this "return" in no way implies the return of the so-called liberal humanist subject, which in fact has never existed but only "insisted" and this primarily in the writings of those most intent on eliminating it (for example, Hayles, 1999). To this extent, the argument here has affinities with the position developed by Justin Clemens and Dominic Pettman (2004) regarding the instability of the category of the human as well as its dependence on the objects that enable it to speak. Note as well Flusser's meditations on humanizations (2002: 181–191).
7. Poster (2001) raises this question.
8. In the best book on surveillance and new media to date, Mark Andrejevic puts the concept to excellent use (2007: 251–254). Chun also draws from Žižek notion of the decline of symbolic efficiency, although she misses his point completely (2006: 269–271). Chun wrongly suggests that Žižek believes that "reasserting symbolic paternal authority will reinforce symbolic authority" omitting entirely from her analysis his discussion of the death(s) of the father(s) in *The Ticklish Subject* (1999).
9. Žižek, 1997, 150–153. As Lacan makes clear in Seminar XVII (2007), there are different discourses, with different structures, within which the Master occupies different positions.
10. Ibid., 153. Dany-Robert Dufour (2008) has a similar discussion.
11. Ibid., 150.
12. By way of contrast, consider Poster's celebratory approach to performativity as self-constitution (2001: 75).
13. Žižek, 1996, 196.
14. Žižek, 1997, 163.

15. Žižek: "In short, the properly dialectical paradox resides in the fact that *the very 'empirical', explicit realization of a principle undermines its reign*" (1996: 195).

16. Žižek, 1997, 155.

17. Žižek, 1996, 196.

18. Ibid.

19. Žižek, 1997, 156.

20. Žižek, 1996, 190.

21. Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter,* trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 1.

22. Ibid., 2.

23. Ibid., 15.

24. Ibid., 258.

25. This is not the only significant overlap. For example, in a more historically grounded discussion of the uncertainties involved in telling the difference between human and machine, a problem Žižek links to cyberspace, Kittler views the problem as preceding even Alan Turing's computer experiments and locates it in the emergence of storage media, particularly film (1999: 146).

26. Žižek, 1997, 164.

27. Žižek, 1996, 197.

28. Žižek , 1997, 164. The description of Kittler is from Mark Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), 70.

29. Hansen, 2004, 71.

30. Ibid., 73.

31. Ibid., 78.

32. Ibid., 75.

33. Ibid., 77.

34. Ibid., 79.

35. Hansen: "Faced with the all-too-frequent contemporary predicament of 'not being able to believe your eyes,' are we not indeed impelled to find other ways to ground belief, ways that reactivate the bodily modalities—tactility, affectivity, proprioception—from which images acquire their force and their 'reality' in the first place?" (2004: 105).

36. Ibid., 78.

37. This term comes from Raymond Ruyer, from whom Hansen draws in this section (2004: 79–84).

38. See Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

39. Hansen, 2004, 95.

40. Ibid., 96.

41. Jacques, Lacan, *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981), 103.

42. Hansen, 2004, 198–199.

43. Ibid., 200.

44. Ibid., 202.

45. Lacan, 1981, 182.

46. Ibid., 75.

47. Žižek in Judith Butler, et al., *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (New York: Verso, 2000), 117.

48. Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, N.C.: Duke, 1993), 197.
49. Lacan, 1981, 72.
50. Joan Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 213–214.
51. Lacan, 1981, 104.
52. Ibid, 177.
53. Žižek, 1999, 297.
54. Ibid.
55. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (New York: Verso, 2008), 328.
56. From the *Introductory Lectures*, quoted by Lacan, *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis,* ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1997), 71.
57. Lacan, 1981, 177.
58. Lacan: "the passage from the oral drive to the anal drive can be produced not by a process of maturation, but by the intervention of something that does not belong to the field of the drive—by the intervention, the overthrow, of the demand of the Other" (1981: 180).
59. Copjec, 2002, 43.
60. Ibid., 53.
61. Lacan, 1981, 169–170.
62. Ibid., 169.
63. Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2006), 26.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Andrejevic (2007) documents the cycle of suspicion with respect to forms of peer-to-peer monitoring and surveillance. See Mark Andrejevic, *iSpy: Suveillance and Power in the Interactive Era* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2007).
67. Žižek, 2006, 63.

Enjoying Social Media

By Matthew Flisfeder

In what follows, my central concern is with the contemporary critique of ideology; but my trajectory involves thinking the operation of ideology in social media. By social media, I mean Web-based network sites that, as boyd and Ellison explain, allow people to "(1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system."[1] The examples of such sites are familiar by now to many and include blogs and sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. My objective is to think critically about the ideological role of social media in the context of late capitalist consumer society—a society defined by what Slavoj Žižek refers to as the "demise of symbolic efficiency," what Fredric Jameson has defined as "postmodern," or what Mark Fisher has more recently referred to as "capitalist realism."[2] Referring as well to Jodi Dean's pioneering work on a Žižekian approach to online media, particularly her conception of "communicative capitalism," my aim is to argue that social media provides a good model for thinking about the connection between ideology and enjoyment at a point when digital media makes possible the conditions for the erosion of the subject of desire. In contrast to Dean, though, my claim is that the ideological operation of social media is one that interpellates the subject in relation to desire rather than drive.

The promise of the Internet is that it will give a voice back to the people, one that has been taken away by private media and entertainment. However, according to Dean, "the expansion and intensification of communication and entertainment networks yield not democracy but something else entirely: communicative capitalism."[3] Dean discusses the conditions of communicative capitalism by examining the world of technoculture, which functions by creating disconnection in the guise of community. Communicative capitalism makes this kind of disconnection operative by engaging users through the repetitive

and reflexive circuits of drive, imposing further gaps in older symbolic networks of community. By doing so, blogging and the use of social networks such as MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter facilitate the integration of users into the matrices of neoliberal capitalism.

While Dean argues that in the context of the demise of symbolic efficiency, drive is not an act[4]—suggesting instead that, in today's circumstances, drive makes ideology work—my claim is not that drive is not an act, but that (to cite the title of one of the sections in Žižek's *The Ticklish Subject*) "perversion is not subversion." That is, what we begin to realize in a period of the decline of big Authority is not that ideology is no longer a matter of desire, but that the "inherent transgression" that sustains the subject's attitude to her enjoyment works today, not by subverting power, but by "willing" it into existence. This is not unlike the masochist who takes a paradoxical pleasure from the violence of the sadist because it allows her to return to a position of loss from which all actual enjoyment takes place. The masochist therefore enjoys turning herself into an object for the other's enjoyment.[5] In order to save her desire, the subject requires (at least the fantasy of) some figure of prohibiting agency whom she can transgress.

Dean, however, proposes that, given the demise of symbolic efficiency, since no prohibiting agency exists, desire gives way to drive, which according to her is the form taken by the subject's relation to enjoyment in the information age. In this sense, Dean argues against Žižek's claim that emancipatory politics follows an ethics of drive. As she explains, "conceived in terms of drive, networked communications circulate less as potentials for freedom than as affective intensities produced through and amplifying our capture."[6] Her argument is largely based on the idea that today, everyone knows that the big Other does not exist; and, therefore, no agency exists that can prevent the subject from realizing her desire. My point, though, is that, given these conditions, the subject of late capitalist consumer society, rather than relating to the loss constitutive of subjectivity—that is, the subject of drive—prefers to disavow the fact of the Other's non-existence in order to preserve the pleasure garnered in the pursuit of the lost object of desire. This is a subject that has yet to accomplish the traversal of the fantasy that sustains her relationship to Authority. The ideological function of social media is, then, one of "willing" the big Other into existence. Social media, in other words, is the answer to the question: "how will capitalism succeed in re-introducing lack and scarcity into a world of instant access and abundance?"[7] Social media has the function of re-introducing a limit into the social field that preserves the subject of desire—this is a limit constitutive of the Symbolic order as such.

While we know that the big Other does not exist, we act as if this were not the case. Why? The Lacanian joke about the man who thought he was a grain of seed—often recounted by Žižek—offers a possible explanation. After months of treatment, the man is convinced by his doctor that he is not a grain

of seed, but a man. Weeks after he is cured, the man returns in an hysterical rage. "What is wrong?" asks his doctor. "You know you are not a grain of seed, but a man." "Yes," replies the man. "I know; but does the chicken know?" This is how the subject reacts to the nonexistence of the big Other. The problem is not the subject's own belief (in the big Other), it is rather the ambiguity of the Other's belief. Or, to take another of Žižek's examples, consider the operation of the stock market.[8] When we play the stock market, we are ultimately placing a bet on what public opinion *believes* public opinion to be. It is this belief in the Other's belief that accounts for our continued relation to the big Other, despite our own personal recognition of its non-existence. It is this ambiguity that provides the pretense for our activity, and social media is the platform through which, today, in popular culture, the big Other continues to be operative.[9]

The End of Ideology

There is a problem with thinking about the critique of ideology, today, in what many view as a post-ideological era. Both the Right and the Left offer up a position on the "end of ideology." On the Right, we have the Fukuyamaist claim that Liberal Democracy and the market economy have triumphed, therefore ending the ideological disputes of twentieth-century politics. The world has appeared to have settled on one true answer. Meanwhile, on the Left, the conception of ideology as "false consciousness," on the one hand, has been thoroughly anihilated by post-Structuralist thinkers, from Foucault to Derrida; while, on the other hand, the popular discrediting of every Master Signifier, or point of ideological fixing, up to and including the Marxist conception of History (Lyotard's "incredulity toward Grand Narratives"), makes it difficult to claim that something like ideology still exists, at least in the Marxist sense.

In the information age—a period that can be roughly associated with the consumer ethic of late capitalism—it is also difficult for critical theorists to claim that ideology still exists since new information technology has eased access to knowledge. As well, media education is no longer something familiar only to scholars—who today does not know about media manipulation and the practices of photoshopping and airbrushing, editing, and CGI effects, let alone the problems of media imperialism, concentration of ownership, and the role of advertising in commercial media? Who, in other words, can we say is still "duped" by the media? Likewise, consumer society has provided everyone with access to the means necessary for realizing all of our pleasures. Consumer society eliminates the notion that our society is one that is based on repression and prohibition. Given these circumstances, how can it be possible to claim that something like ideology (let alone false consciousness) or Authority still exists? It is in *this* sense that we need to understand the contemporary critique of ideology in the context of what Žižek has referred to as "the demise of symbolic efficiency."

The Demise of Symbolic Efficiency; or, The Big Other Does Not Exist

The problem for the critique of ideology is that, today, with the "end of ideology," and the pleasure ethic of consumer society, no one seems to believe any longer in the existence of the big Other. The "demise of symbolic efficiency" and "the big Other does not exist" are two formulations for the same basic situation. The Symoblic order is no longer held together because every Master-Signifier articulated has been reduced to a mere effect of fixing, or suture. This is why Fredric Jameson is accurate in referring to the Lacanian formula for psychosis in his description of Postmodernism as a "breakdown of the signifying chain." There is no totalality that determines the flow of language; rather, what we have is a series of free-floating discourses and signifiers, local "language games," unbound by a universal totality. Jameson's point about the postmodern breakdown of the signifying chain pertains to the specificity of the historical moment of the political mediations of postmodernism, particularly those of the postwar period, which saw the formation of new social movements (NSMs), from feminism, anti-racism, and the gay rights and liberation movements, that took the place of the proletarian struggle against capital. The positive and progressive aspects of the NSMs destabilized (to some degree) the phallo(go)centrism, white-supremicism, and heterornormativity of the reigning order—or, at least these movements allowed the underlying elements of these aspects of power to be brought to the surface and enter mainstream consciousness, if they were not necessarily able to erradicate these forms of power.

It could, however, be argued that the end result of non-class-based NSMs has been the triumph of consumer identity politics. The demands of NSMs are capable of being realized by consumer society. Identity politics and consumerism are natural allies. Consumer society asks of the individual not to repress who she is—*consumer society does not prohibit*. Its ethic is one of fully realizing the Self. "Be your true self!" The interpellative call of postmodern, late capitalist consumer society is, simply, "Enjoy!" Because there is no longer any agency of prohibition it is possible to claim that the big Other no longer exists. But what the lack of prohibition presents is, however, a severe problem for the preservation of the *desire* of the subject.

Obligatory Enjoyment

Žižek argues that when ideology is no longer a matter of false consciousness, then its mode of operation shifts away from the Symbolic and toward a fantasmatic specter: an ideological fantasy that gives structure and support to our reality. Reality, as such, is according to Žižek always-already ideological, structured by some underlying fantasy formation that puts us in relation to our desire. The Symbolic surface level of every ideology is supported by a "sublime object" of ideology that subjectivizes us in relation to our enjoyment. The problem of ideology is not that people are not aware of their actions and how they

contribute to the reigning order. The problem is that people are fully aware, but they continue to act as if this was not the case. Even more than this, it is our very resistance to ideology—our attempts to transgress (what we perceive to be) the reigning order—that traps us even further within its grasps. Subversion and transgression are the very conditions for our capture by ideology precisely because this kind of action procures a perverse pleasure.

There is a perverse core (in the strictest Lacanian sense) to the form of ideology: specifically, ideology in the context of postmodern, late capitalist consumer society, takes the form of fetishism.[10] In part, this has to do with the interpellative call of postmodern consumer society, the call to "Enjoy!" Prohibition to enjoy has been replaced by an *obligation* to enjoy. However, this also has to do with the mode of ideology today, which according to Žižek is premised on cynicism and the psychoanalytic category of disavowal, best encapsulated by Octave Manoni's phrase, "*Je sais bien, mais quand même . . .*"[11]—I know very well, but nevertheless . . .

From a Lacanian perspective, the price of entry into the Symbolic order is a constitutive loss. As McGowan puts it, "no subjectivity exists prior to this structuring loss."[12] But the subject has two possible modes of relating to this constitutive loss—desire and drive:

> desire is predicated on the belief that it is possible to regain the lost object and thereby discover the ultimate enjoyment. Desire represents a belief that a satisfying object exists and can be obtained. In contrast, the drive locates enjoyment in the movement of return itself—the repetition of loss, rather than in what might be recovered.[13]

These two modes—desire and drive—are, however, tied to each other: the "continuing frustration of desire—this failure to obtain the truly satisfying object—is the precise way that the drive satisfies itself. Through the drive, the subject finds satisfaction in the repetition of failure and loss that initially constitute it."[14] Desire, in other words, serves the drive as a mechanism for facilitating the repetition of the loss, "which is where enjoyment actually lies."[15] There is a problem, though, for the subject of desire in the context of postmodern, post-ideological, late captitalist, consumer society: without a prohibiting agency; with the demise of symbolic efficiency; when no one believes any longer in the existence of the big Other—what is to prevent the saturation of desire? The constant injunction to "Enjoy!" presents a dilemma: we can only enjoy insofar as we are prohibited from enjoying.

For Žižek, fetishism disavowal expresses the contemporary reigning cynical approach to ideology. Cynicism, as McGowan puts it, "is a mode of keeping alive the dream of successfully attaining the lost object while fetishistically denying one's investment in this idea."[16] The post-ideological subject can fully recognize the fact that investment in the object of desire is doomed to failure, but nevertheless, she continues to invest herself in the search for this object. True satisfaction is achieved, not by the successful attainment of the object, but

by the enjoyment of returning to the position of loss through failure. Drive is definitely a central aspect of contemporary communicative capitalism; however, we should be hesitant about claiming that the subject of communicative capitalism is one of drive.

The (Digital) Delay of Desire

"Communicative capitalism" is an attractive way to theorize the current configurations of networked media, and it is difficult to disagree with Dean's characterization of the ideological operations of information technology and social media.[17] Her theory allows media scholars to grapple with the conditions of space-based media, where the limits of time are increasingly eroding. Noting the similarities between early blogs and search engines, Dean points out that both originate in the problem of organizing information online. Filled by "the fantasy of abundance,"[18] online users had previously been plagued by the problem of locating sought-after information. Like the Lacanian theory of the unconscious, Dean points out that in cyberspace "the truth is out there" but difficult to find within the sea of abundance.

Dean notes that the first blogs were lists of websites, links, and articles, noteworthy to the blogger. Bloggers also added comments about the links that they posted. Like search engines, blogs emerged in place of the "subject supposed to know" (the Lacanian analyst). The search engine and the online database also work in combination to avoid the time lag, or the delay, the result of which is the "spatialization" time. This adds to the difficulty in grasping a conception of prohibition in postmodernity. Everything is available; there are no limits to access. Desire is no longer prohibited by time—the time necessary to locate and achieve satisfaction; everything is present, located in the database. The result is a crisis for the subject of desire—how to save the saturation of desire. This is how we might concede to Dean's claim that drive makes communicative capitalism operative, and therefore unlikely to work for a political act of resistance and transformation. The disappearance of the delay, which made satisfaction of desire appear possible, leaves only the drive on the other side of fantasy.

New media, information technology, and social media add to this mix. There is no longer any denial of access (that is if we ignore the global digital divide). Everything is open and available online. But does instant access suffocate desire? There is an important temporal dimension to desire, that of the delay. Desire exists only insofar as the object remains lost. Increasingly, as the delay is reduced closer to zero, it can become apparent to the subject that there is a limit point to desire. The temporal limit is spatialized—delay is no longer the primary factor in distancing oneself from desire. It is now a matter of space—the space of the database. The object is there; it is no longer lost. The suffocation of desire—the reduction of the delay to zero—appears to leave only the drive that circles around the void of the loss. From Žižek's perspective, this is what can potentially lead the subject toward some kind of break from ideology.

Desire involves the endless search for an (impossible) object that will bring satisfaction. But desire is, by definition, insatiable. It continues to follow along a cycle in which the object attained is never *it*, the thing that is desired. This constant search for the object produces an unconscious satisfaction in being able to reset the coordinates of desire, continuing the search. Drive speaks to this other side of insatiable desire. It achieves enjoyment for the subject by *failing* to get the object. With desire, one can never achieve full enjoyment; however, with drive, one is condemned to an unbearable enjoyment. According to Žižek, "desire and drive are two ways of avoiding the deadlock of negativity that *is* the subject . . . The two ways . . . involve two thoroughly different notions of subjectivity."[19] The subject of desire chooses, whereas for the subject of drive, choice is inverted into making-oneself-chosen. The only freedom I am granted in drive "is the freedom to choose the inevitable, freely to embrace my destiny, what will happen to me in any case."[20] That is, the subject of drive recognizes the constitutive aspect of loss, which the subject of desire disavows.

The reversal of desire into drive, therefore, involves the subjectivization of that which is beyond representation. That is, we subjectivize the traumatic kernel—the negative limit—of the Self. Žižek argues, therefore, that an ethical *act* is in line with an ethics of the drive.[21] If desire is that which attaches the subject to ideology, the drive moves the subject in the direction of emancipation. In the psychoanalytic sense, the drive is all that remains once the subject has "traversed the fantasy." That is, "if no object can satisfy desire, desire must proceed for its own sake, which means that it must become drive. The drive is what remains of desire after the image of realization has been stripped away. It is desire without the hope of obtaining the object, desire that has become indifferent to its object."[22] The instant access of technoculture leads, potentially, to this stripping away of the subject of desire. As McGowan notes, "the immediacy created by digital technology plants the seeds for the recognition of the subject of drive."[23] But it is here that we see how ideology is still structured and supported by fantasy:

> There is, of course, nothing necessary about the emergence of the subject of drive. The contemporary spatialization of time may simply continue to produce dissatisfied subjects of desire who continue to increase their investment in the illusory promise embodied by the commodity. As long as we experience the object's failure as contingent rather than necessary, we will remain subjects of desire devoted to the capitalist mode of production.[24]

Symbolic Identities

How, then, to save desire from its suffocation in an age of abundance and instant access? Social media, I claim, is the manner in which capitalism has succeeded in re-introducing lack and scarcity into a world of instant access and abundance. In social media, the subject, who no longer believes in the

existence of the big Other, works toward a willing of the big Other back into existence. The subject caught in social media is not duped by ideology, but seeks it out in order to save herself from the saturation of her desire; to save herself from the anxiety of living under the conditions of the demise of symbolic efficiency; and, to save herself from the traumatic encounter with the impossible-Real that has been opened up by the limit points of the Symbolic. Social media is one example of the secular solution to the lack of a big Other (paralleled by a fundamentalist turn to conservatism and tradition). People, in other words, engage with social media, "not to *escape from*, but rather in order *to escape to* a social reality that protects (mediates) us more effectively from the truly traumatic issues and concerns that belie our 'normal' lives."[25] Social media is a new frontier for desire. This can be seen in three operations of social network sites deinfed by boyd and Ellison: the public profile, connecting to a network, and the operation of "sharing." For the sake of brevity, I will rely on examples from Facebook in the analysis that follows.

One of the central questions we need to pose about the profile page is to whether it is a representation of the subject's Imaginary or Symbolic sense of Self. According to Dean, the society of control and communicative capitalism make possible the conditions for replacing Symbolic identities with Imaginary ones. The latter is one aspect of the dominance of neoliberalism and its emphasis on the cult of the individual, away from the welfare state's emphasis on community. Communicative capitalism, then, "does not provide symbolic identities, sites from which we can see ourselves. Rather, it offers in their place new ways for me to imagine myself, an immense variety of lifestyles with which I can experiment."[26] In communicative capitalism, we are not interpellated into "symbolically anchored identities;" instead, we are enjoined "to develop our creative potential and cultivate our individuality."[27] This characterization, however, is perhaps more appropriate to the brief decade-long period between the popular arrival of the Internet and the arrival of social media. In the 1990s, the attitude was that nobody on the Internet knows who you really are (best encapsulated by the parody cartoon, "on the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog")[28]—online, we can present a different persona and no one will know: perhaps the ultimate victory for identity politics. Today, though, the mechanisms of control and big data are so precise, that it is possible to determine one's offline identity by way of online activity. The profile page provides some indication of how this works.

On Facebook, details about one's city of residence, contact information, marital/relationship status, date of birth, employment history, and education, are all provided on the public profile. What is even more important is that this information is provided freely and willingly by the user herself. Of course, providing a minimum of this information is required in order to join the site; however, the necessity of joining is another significant aspect of social media. The price of inclusion is the willful submission to the mechanisms of surveillance. Additional information is also provided on the profile page:

photographs in which one is "tagged"—thus providing a true-life image of the subject on the site, as opposed to the avatar; places that one has visited; interests, such as music, film, television, books, etc., with specific titles and names of artists and authors—the latter are provided by the operation of "liking"; the profile page also lists the names of Facebook groups in which the user is a member. To whom is all of this data presented? The answer, of course, is another piece of data that makes up the profile page: the friends list—that is, the user's online social network.

The network is a list of people with whom the user maintains contact online. These may or may not be those with whom the user is actively engaged in offline life. This, though, is the list of others to whom the user is presenting her Self as an objectified entity: a combination of the commodification of the Self and the entrepreneurial ethic of neoliberalism. In fact, in some cases, it is the user's friends list, or network, that makes her desireable to others, a demonstration of her "symoblic capital"—this is even more pronounced on the professional social media site, LinkedIn, where it really is "who you know" that counts. What's important, though, is that it is the "friends" in social media that are the target of one's activity, whether it is the operation of liking, sharing, commenting, or updating one's status.

"Liking" is the operation of demonstrating—through the simple click of the mouse—something about one's taste. "Sharing" similarly presents something about one's taste but can also add detail about an opinion on anything from humor to politics—it is a demonstration of one's "cultural capital." One may share articles and images that are of interest to oneself, and potentially to one's Facebook friends. Sharing, though, is also an operation of showing to others something about one's own sense of humor, political sensibility, and so on. Images, as well, can be shared—most popularly in recent years is the meme: an image or video that is passed electronically online. Recent memes often take the form of images with short/quick catchy captions, often expressing either some cynical or ironic observation about contemporary life and politics. Liking and sharing act symbolically. They are articulations of one's subject position within the field of the Symbolic. Likes and shares are enunciated contents. It is the operation of articulating signfiers which "represent a subject for another signifier."[29] Similarly, comments and status updates articulate in language the subject's Self-representation for others. Comments and status updates take the form of the blog and reduce it to short, simple, statements. The furthest extreme of this, so far, is Twitter, in which users must express themselves in 140 characters or less. Beyond the word, though, Instragram has reduced this function to the mere image. With Instagram, users can upload images taken with their mobile phones, without the labor required of articulating their affects in words.[30]

Moblie media, such as smart phones, simplify these operations. Not only can we particpate in social media wherever we roam—without the use of a personal computer—now, it is possible to easily share images and videos captured on one's phone, easing the signifying aspect of Self-representation in

social media. This is of course the operation of control society moving beyond the disciplinary mechanisms of surveillance. But the degree to which we are integrated into these mechanisms, despite the fact that we are aware of how they work, demonstrates the way in which social media acts as the willing into existence of the big Other. Not because we are monitored, but because it is the agency of the Other for whom we perform our Symbolic identities in social media, which is increasingly connected to the world offline. I tweet, therefore I exist; and the compulsion to (re)tweet is the symptom of our needing to feel affective reognition from the Other.

Analyst or Pevert: Or How to Break Free of the Circuits

Since the subjects of communicative capitalism are, according to Dean, already subjects of drive, it certainly appears as though an ethics of drive is off the table for a revolutionary politics—or does it? Perhaps what the demise of symbolic efficiency demonstrates is that the line between ideology and emancipation is thinning out. A political ethics of drive depends largely upon the way in which the demise of symbolic efficiency is interpreted and approached. If it is read, in Lacanian terms, as the non-existence of the big Other, pure and simple—the Other of the Symbolic order, regulating and organizing Symbolic reality—then surely it is necessary to concede Dean's main argument, that a politics of drive is not possible today, or the "drive is not an act." But what if the postmodern subject's recognition of the non-existence of the big Other is *only* apparent?

Dean further agues, contra Žižek, that in the context of the demise of symbolic efficiency the position of the analyst, as defined by the Lacanian discourse of the analyst, loses its radical subjective positioning. The analyst's position of subjective destitution is one of drive. But, according to Dean, if we think of the social link of the discourse of the analyst within the context of the demise of symbolic efficiency, the position of the analyst as one of pure drive is no longer radical.[31] This, however, makes sense if we conceive the position of the agent in the analyst's discourse, not as that of the analyst, but as that of the pervert, which carries the same form as that of the analyst (a - $\$$).[32] The pervert and the anlayst are separated by a thin line, which we can attribute to fantasy. That is, they share the same basic structure, and are grouned in a certain kind of knowledge; however, the analyst has successfully traversed the fantasy—she acknowldeges loss as constitutive—while the pevert has not—he wishes, still, to be the object for the Other's *jouissance*, since it preserves his own enjoyment. The analyst accepts the position of subjective destitution, while the pervert wills the Other back into existence in order to preserve his perverse pleasure.

It is worth conceiving the demise of symbolic efficiency, then, not necessarily as the loss of the Symbolic order as such (the non-existence of the big Other), but rather as the loss of the symbolic efficiency of the analyst's interpretation. According to Žižek, postmodernity is marked by a crisis in interpretation, leaving the symptom intact.[33] The problem, then, is how to bring a

rupture in the subject's symptomal chain, when she herself already recognizes the interpretive procedure of locating its cause. According to Žižek, the loss of the efficiency of interpretation is one way to diagnose the postmodern condition of the demise of symbolic efficiency.

This, too, is how one should read Fredric Jameson's notion of "cognitive mapping"—lacking the symbolic weight of interpreting her position in the world, the subject remains lost, trapped in a situation, without any means of making sense of herself and her position in the world. What this means, then, is that—while agreeing with Dean's *characterization* of communicative capitalism—the conditions of emancipation involve not redirecting the loop of drive, but of sticking to the "cognitive mapping" of the anlaytical discourse: the analytical position is one of willing to sacrifice desire; while the position of the pervert recognizes the failure of the object, but nevertheless enjoys her symptom. The latter is the type of subject position interpellated for our enjoyment of social media. While enjoying social media we are still subjects of desire.

Notes

1. d. m. boyd and N. B. Ellison (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *13*(1), 2007. http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/boyd.ellison.html
2. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* (New York: Verso, 1999); Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review* I 146: 53-92, 1984; and, Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Zero Books, 2009).
3. Jodi Dean, *Publicity's Secret: How Technoculture Capitalizes on Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 2002), 3.
4. Dean, *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2010), 31.
5. On this topic, see Todd McGowan's brief, but poignant explanation in *Enjoying What We Don't Have: The Political Project of Psychoanalysis* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska, 2013), 14–15.
6. Ibid.
7. Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: On Schelling and Related Matters* (New York: Verso, 1996), 190.
8. Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (New York: Verso, 2009), 10–11.
9. Žižek notes that "the very 'positing' of the big Other is a subjective gesture" and that "the big Other is a virtual entity that exists only through the subject's presupposition." One of the arguments that I make here is that, although the postmodern subject is capable of pronouncing the nonexistence of the big Other, she still posits its existence in a displaced way in order to preserve a desire, mediated by fantasy. This gesture of positing the big Other's existence is, I claim, reified in social media. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (New York: Verso, 2008), 113.
10. We might even say that, in the context of postmodern, consumer society, commodity fetishism as the *form* of ideology implicit in capitalism is fully realized.
11. See Octave Mannoni, *Clefs pour l'imaginaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1969).

12. McGowan, *Out of Time: Desire in Atemporal Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2011), 11.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., 29.

17. See Dean, *Publicity's Secret*, *Blog Theory*, and *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* (Durham, NC: Duke, 2009).

18. See Dean, 2009, 42.

19. Žižek, 1999, 299.

20. Ibid.

21. Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke, 1993), 60.

22. McGowan, 28.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., 29.

25. Paul A. Taylor, *Žižek and the Media* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2011), 78.

26. Dean, 2009, 66.

27. Ibid, 67.

28. *The Joy of Tech* comic strip recently updated this cartoon in light of the revelations in the United States about NSA surveillance through social media: "On the Internet Nobody Knows You're a Dog—1990s and Now." June 17, 2013, http://www.joyoftech.com/joyoftech/joyarchives/1862.html

29. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, *1964–1965*. Alan Sheridan, trans. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1977), 207.

30. Here, though, it is possible to consider the image, not necessarily and simply as an aspect of the Imginary, but perhaps more appropriately as a "parallax object" that is split between the Symbolic Master-Signifier and the Imgainary *objet petit a*.

31. Dean, 2010, 88.

32. Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2006), 303.

33. See Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor,* 2nd Ed. (New York: Verso, 2002), xci.

Is Torture Part of Your Social Network?

By Tara Atluri

In *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, Slavoj Žižek draws on concepts from Lacanian psychoanalysis to discuss the bombing of the World Trade Center. He writes,

> It was when we watched the two WTC towers collapsing on the TV screen, that it became possible to experience the falsity of "reality TV shows": even if these shows are "for real," people still act in them—they are simply playing themselves.[1]

I use Žižek's writing to discuss *The Guantanamo Files*, an interactive website launched by *The Guardian* in 2010. *The Guantanamo Files* functions like a social media site like Facebook, where one can click on photos and snippets of information about prisoners being held in Guantanamo Bay. *The Guantanamo Files* offers an entry point into thinking through the relationship between desire, drive, and anxiety in regard to Internet-based technology and spectacles of terror. When people visit the site, they are struck by the resemblance it bears to social media sites and the disturbingly commercial layout in which prisoners' photos and numbers flash on the screen. Termed an "interactive database," viewers are told they can find out who's who speaking to the conflation between media celebrity and "terror."[2]

Žižek argues that within cultures of technological surveillance, the true fear is not that one is being spied on, but that they are not being watched at all.[3] We can, perhaps, ask how this might inform the need to see Guantanamo prisoners as Western publics now see themselves, as celebrities broadcasting themselves online in narcissistic ways that turn everyday life into reality television. There are also no images of female bodies or feminine names in *The Guantanamo Files*. I discuss the "next top terrorist" spectacle of the Muslim man in relation

to the Muslim woman in niqab being pushed out of public space. Žižek argues that the fear of the niqab lies in how one is confronted with the radical Otherness of the Other who cannot be egoistically consumed as a self-same body or a saleable form of multicultural capital.[4] How might the fear of the Other as radically Other relate to the need to visually see Guantanamo prisoners in public Internet stagings that represent the banal ways Western publics live their lives through social media sites?

Žižek has argued in relation to the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib that Iraqis were given an introduction to the American way of life, as they were subject to ritualistic violence that functions as microcosms of nationalist violence such as university hazing rituals. One can consider the relationship between the suicide bomber in *The Guantanamo Files* and cases of cyberbullying, such as the case of James Rodemeyer, a young American boy who killed himself after being attacked by homophobic bullies online. Rodemeyer's last act was to post his suicide note on Facebook. Both examples reveal the murderous biopolitical aspects of Western capitalism and the antisocial aspects of social media sites.

Žižek writes of psychological humiliation enacted against Palestinians as a "systematic 'micro-politics' of psychological humiliations: the Palestinians are basically treated as evil children who have to be brought back to an honest life through stern discipline and punishment."[5] The "evil child" is useful in discussing the role social media plays both in shaming non-normative Western children through sites such as Facebook and, in sites such as *The Guantanamo Files*, where lives become spectacles that are ordered and moralized by audiences. Žižek writes, "we are entering a time in which a state of peace itself can at the same time be a state of emergency."[6] In the infinite space of Internet time, which lulls viewers into passive observation while tapping into disavowed desires and drives, perhaps *The Guantanamo Files* confirms that we are in fact in a time of emergency, clicking away.

Facebook Friends and Terrorist Neighbors:
The Muslim Body and "Public Space"

On another level, Žižek discusses how the anxiety directed toward veiled Muslim women reveals the deep-seated insecurities of secular Europeans. He writes, "the argument then as a rule shifts towards the anxieties of the non-Muslim French people themselves: faces covered by burka do not fit the coordinates of the French culture and identity, they 'intimidate and alienate non-Muslims.'"[7] He further adds "Some French women even used the argument that they experience someone wearing a burka as their own humiliation, as being brutally excluded, rejected from a social link."[8] Perhaps there is a relationship of symmetry between anxieties concerning veiled Muslim women in public space and *The Guantanamo Files*.

The first level of the critique lies in a paternalistic argument that attempts to save women from the social exclusion that belonging to a religious community

is imagined to entail. In this argument, Muslim women are constructed as not being given choices because their choices do not approximate those of secular Western publics. The second argument is that it is the French who are threatened by a body that is visibly marked as a religious subject.[9] Žižek draws on John Gray, who writes, "New technologies alter our lives daily. The traditions of the past cannot be retrieved. At the same time we have little idea of what the future will bring. We are forced to live as if we were free."[10] I want to suggest that efforts to forcibly remove Muslim women from public space are directly tied to images of captivity in *The Guantanamo Files*. Interestingly, Žižek suggests that the anxiety concerning the burka lies in the fear that the white Western secular subject has of being "rejected from the social link."[11] In the other culturally chauvinist position, the Muslim woman is imagined to desire a "social link" with the Western secular world. The term "social link" gestures to "network"-based cultures that now define late capitalism, with social capital being dependent on social links made in largely antisocial and disembodied ways online.

Žižek discusses the relationship between the new ethos of "liberal communists" and the technological turn in production and social life. He writes,

> So who are these liberal communists? The usual suspects: Bill Gates and George Soros, the CEOs of Google, IBM, Intel, eBay, as well as court-philosophers like Thomas Friedman. The true conservatives today, they argue, are not only the old right, with its ridiculous belief in authority, order, and parochial patriotism, but also the old left, with its war against capitalism: both fight their shadow-theatre battles in disregard of the new realities. The signifier of this new reality in the liberal communist Newspeak is "smart." Being smart means being dynamic and nomadic, and against centralized bureaucracy; believing in dialogue and cooperation as against central authority; in flexibility as against routine; culture and knowledge as against industrial production; in spontaneous interaction and autopoiesis as against fixed hierarchy.[12]

This "liberal communist" ethic, which masks overarching questions regarding global capitalism under the guise of issue-based charity, corresponds to what Žižek terms a leftist "chain of equivalences." He writes,

> The Leftist politics of the "chain of equivalences" among the plurality of struggles is strictly correlative to the abandonment of the analysis of capitalism as a global economic system—that is, to the tacit acceptance of capitalist economic relations and democratic politics as the unquestioned framework of our social life.[13]

This tacit acceptance structures *The Guantanamo Files*, which offers left-leaning liberals infotainment regarding war that gives the impression that one can engage in political struggle from a comfortable position of Western spectatorship. The wider authoritarian discourse of American military power is an unfashionable truth circumvented by Internet spectacle. Within

The Guantanamo Files, perhaps one sees the mirror image of "the politics of representation" that defines identity-based movements. The fetishization of representing minority groups meets its perverse reversal in sites such as *The Guantanamo Files* in which narratives of terror are disseminated to "represent" the pathologized Muslim other, divorced from any analysis of global capitalism and its role in producing captive prisoners and captive audiences.

Žižek exposes the problem with the reliance on experiential narratives that replace a greater political vision. He writes, "one could expose how the cultural relativism of the 'right-to-narrate' orientation contains its own apparent opposite, the fixation on the Real of some trauma which resists its narrativization."[14] The "right to narrate" stories of male prisoners, often in well-intentioned and empathetic ways that point out that many are Afghani farmers detained under suspicious circumstances meets its opposite, the traumatic Real of war that resists narration. The trauma of detention and torture is silently accepted and managed through narratives of prisoners that give an illusion that one is participating in politics through personal stories. The untranslatable corporeal pain of the detained and tortured body is ignored through the fetish of narrative.[15] Furthermore, the wider coordinates of global capitalism that produce the unspectacular violence of poverty is also masked through a focus on explosive narratives of terror in sites such as *The Guantanamo Files*.

In *Violence,* Žižek discusses how an overdeterminant focus on subjective violence obscures objective forms of violence which he suggests "are invisible since they sustain the very zero level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent."[16] He further suggests

> the overpowering horror of violent acts and empathy with the victims inexorably function as a lure that prevents us from thinking. A dispassionate conceptual development of the typology of violence must by definition ignore its traumatic impact.[17]

Focusing on grandiose stories of terror offers no space to reflect on standardized forms of objective violence from which we perceive and name "terror." One can consider the Internet-based medium of *The Guantanamo Files* in which photos and narratives of male, Muslim prisoners are disseminated to largely secular Western English-speaking viewers. Perhaps the Internet-based medium through which we perceive the subjective violence of war and "fundamentalism" functions as an objectively violent structure that expresses divisions of class, language, and religion that are exacerbated and produced by the war on terror. The irony of *The Guantanamo Files* lies in how efforts to supposedly care about terror and war supports the economic, political, and epistemic hierarchies that produce and are perhaps the cause of war and the violence it generates.

The Fetish of Information: War Is Over If You Want to Stop Tweeting About It

I want to suggest that leaking information regarding detention, torture, and war might serve as a fetish that allows bodily violence to continue. "Knowing the facts" in *The Guantanamo Files* involves reading a litany of information regarding every detainee to the point that the viewer/reader is over saturated with details. The fetish of information that manages the traumatic real of the tortured body is met with the irony of the technological form that these stories take. While a great deal has been written about the use of the Internet in the Arab Spring protests, cyber-feminism, and other new social movements,[18] I believe that how technology functions in "the war on terror" is worthy of critical reflection. Consider how technology is employed by the American military to teach soldiers to kill in ways that mimic video games. Technology plays an active role in desensitizing soldiers, turning weapons of mass destruction into boys' toys that can be used without conscience in expedient ways. There is a masculinist childishness that defines how war is waged and how one watches war being waged. The fetish of technology manages the trauma of defamed human bodies and bodies of land.[19]

Lava Life and Death by Fire: The Gendered Dimensions of *The Guantanamo Files*

In a perverse expression of the obscene underbellies of "social media" sites that promise "social links," *The Guantanamo Files* is a terrorist Facebook that reveals how radically excluded Others must be present to maintain the seamless "community" of Western secular rationalities. The captive images of male bodies and named prisoners are, on the one hand, constructed victims for public spectacle, shame, and scrutiny. And yet, they are also constructed threats, associated with a monstrous deviance through narratives of criminality that accompany their photos. As with the veiled Muslim woman, their radical exclusion is a gendered exclusion that supports idealized gendered performatives of Western secular publics. The veiled Muslim woman is either not woman enough by virtue of a secular gendered discourse that imagines her to be subject to patriarchal repression or too much of a woman, associated with an exclusionary feminine space that bars secular women and men from entry.[20]

The male bodies in *The Guantanamo Files* site are also constructed as deviant in gendered ways. They are emasculated through prison walls and computer screens while paradoxically constructed as bearing a monstrous masculinity through stories of terror that depict aggressive, individualistic, emotionless men who are radically excluded from Western secularism and any trace of the feminine. Mainstream media representations of terror often have gendered dynamics. Consider the multiple television shows and documentaries that have

surfaced since the bombing of the World Trade Center, in which Muslim women are cast as victims of the violence of Muslim men. The violence of the Muslim man is glorified in ways that allow audiences to indulge in racist fantasies under the guise of a gendered pity that strips Muslim women of political agency.[21]

The design of *The Guantanamo Files* lies between "Terrorist Facebook" and a video game, offering masculinist forms of media. Rather than the archetypally feminine human-interest story, we are presented with tables of data regarding who's who and cold concrete information involving crimes that prisoners have supposedly committed. The libidinal investment in the violence of the Muslim man is also expressed without the body of the Muslim woman to invoke pity.

There is perhaps an overarching relationship between masculinity, technology, and war being staged in seemingly banal ways. This interactive formula allows bodies to be seen infinitely. The Muslim male body removed from public view appears before our eyes online, just as the woman in burka has become an object of perverse curiosity. In "Multiculturalism or the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism," Žižek suggests that within consumer driven ideas of multiculturalism, "the other that is tolerated is the other of charming [folkloric] wisdoms . . . any real other is dismissed for its fundamentalism."[22] In this regard, one can ask how the charming saleable other whose difference can be marketed to Western publics through ethnic products relates to the figure of the "terrorist" held captive, out of the bounds of the nation state, but also held captive in sites such as *The Guantanamo Files*. *The Guantanamo Files*, powered by American multinational Internet companies and supported by online advertising, can now make the supposed "fundamentalist" other into a saleable product, just as the charming ethnic is used to brand cities and nations as "multicultural" in lucrative ways.[23]

Click the "Like" Button, Not the Red Button:
Sex, Torture, and Antisocial Media

While the social network cultures of late capitalism sell themselves as fun, friendly, and harmless, how might these Internet connections express some of the underlying pathologies of late capitalism? James Rodemeyer was a 14-year-old American boy who killed himself in 2010 after reading these words on Facebook: JAMES IS FAT, GAY, UGLY, STUPID. HE MUST DIE. Rodemeyer's last act before killing himself was to post his suicide note on Facebook. This chilling act of violence, while expressing anxieties toward bodies marked as queer, also reveals the obscene underbellies of normative late-capitalist technologies. Following the release of photos of tortured prisoners at Abu Ghraib, Rush Limbaugh minimized torture committed by U.S. soldiers, comparing these acts to "hazing rituals." In a brilliant reversal of Limbaugh's comment, Žižek suggested that the resemblances between torture and hazing rituals do not reveal minimal trauma, but in fact reveal the extreme perversions that lie at the core of American patriotism. Žižek writes, "What we get when we see the photos

of humiliated Iraqi prisoners is precisely a direct insight into 'American values,' into the core of an obscene enjoyment that sustains the American way of life"[24] not a shocking abberation within a harmonious social world. It is against the body of the humiliated other that cultures of normative American sociality are formed. The American army needs the tortured prisoner to solidify a social bond in a similar way that fraternity jocks need an art fag to torture. One can see a passionate attachment to the ritualistically excluded other. Žižek has written of the sexual underbelly of the army, which, while appearing to be a masculinist and heteronormative culture, is upheld by desires and fantasies of homosexuality. In this regard, one can see photos of tortured prisoners at Abu Ghraib revealing the racialized aspect of disavowed homosexual desire within the U.S military that finds its expression against the radically excluded and fetishistically desired Other.

The use of the social network of Facebook to stage James Rodemeyer's death expressed a passionate hatred expressed through technological tools that allow one to indulge in an obsessive gaze and an anonymous action that requires no reciprocity. Žižek also drew on the comments made by Donald Rumsfeld regarding what Rumsfeld termed the "unknown knowns" of Saddam Hussein that Rumsfeld suggested pose the real threat to the American public. Žižek suggests that the true danger lies in the unknown knowns of the obscene underbelly of American public culture. He writes,

> If Rumsfeld thinks that the main dangers in the confrontation with Iraq were the "unknown unknowns," that is, the threats from Saddam whose nature we cannot even suspect, then the Abu Ghraib scandal shows that the main dangers lie in the "unknown knowns"—the disavowed beliefs, suppositions, and obscene practices we pretend not to know about, even though they form the background of our public values.[25]

The obscene underbelly of the "American way of life" finds expression online and through the covert ways bodies are regulated through the banal world of social media. The "antisocial" underbelly of Western secular cultures now finds its voice through (anti)social media. In this regard, the Internet allows for a form of mental masturbation, in which one is free to express disavowed desires without needing a partner to respond. *The Guantanamo Files* offers a similar structure, in which prisoners can be included in one's social network in ways that allow for an obsessive, disciplinary gaze. Žižek suggests that attitudes of tolerance mask the obsessive fear that is also a defining feature of discourses of cultural cohesion. He writes,

> One is tempted to reactualize here the old Marcusean notion of "repressive tolerance," reconceiving it as the tolerance of the Other in its aseptic, benign form, which forecloses the dimension of the Real of the Other's jouissance.[26]

In this regard, one can ask how the Internet offers a means through which this fear of and simultaneous inclusion of the other is accomplished.

Captive Audiences: Enjoy Your War!

In *The Plague of Fantasies*, Žižek discusses the relationship between bodies, cyberspace, and late capitalism. The normative late capitalist secular subject is held captive in front of an Internet screen, often prevented from an embodied existence due to the stasis of Internet-based cultures. Paradoxically, Žižek discusses how the late-capitalist body is also encouraged to engage in constant forms of bodily self-improvement, ranging from gyms to diets. Perhaps these paradoxes of the body can also be seen in sites such as The Guantanamo Files. The disembodied apprehension of war as information or worse entertainment is met with the overdeterminance of the body within acts of torture by the American military and allied powers. Žižek writes of the gap that emerges in cyberspace between illusion and substance. He discusses a 2006 *Time Magazine* "Person of the Year" cover in which the person of the year was "you," the anonymous Internet user. Žižek writes of the *Time* magazine issue,

> The cover showed a white keyboard with a mirror for a computer screen where readers can see their own reflection. To justify the choice, *Time's* editors cited the shift from institutions to individuals who are said to be emerging as the citizens of a new digital democracy.[27]

Žižek suggests that this rhetoric of a "digital revolution," "covers up a series of disturbing gaps and tensions." Among the gaps and tensions, Žižek notes, lies the difference between the inertia of captive audiences and consumers that the Internet creates as opposed to the illusion of movement within the Internet world. He suggests that virtual reality,

> provides reality deprived of substance. In the same way that decaffeinated coffee smells and tastes like real coffee without being the real thing, my entire screen persona, the "you" that I see there is a decaffeinated self.[28]

The digital citizen corresponds with the dissolution of collective action that would hold state powers accountable for the collapse of the social welfare state and the ongoing war on terror that Western publics continue to fund despite mass opposition. What we might bear witness to is how one is invited to actively participate in war in ways that mask implication through the banality of technology. The content, format, and design of *The Guantanamo Files* expresses how the supposed "digital revolution" and rise of "digital citizens" produces publics for whom politics, information, entertainment, and consumer capitalism are blurred. The viewer/consumer who is neither implicated nor affected by politics is a defining feature of the war on terror, in which one is exposed to

constant stories of war with no way to challenge state and military power. We have citizens of the Internet without citizenship as politics.

The fantasmatic spectacle of the screen allows for an illusion of political participation without ideological conflict. The very real practices of detention against bodies of prisoners are displaced into the escapism of an infotainment war. Consider also the role the Internet plays in staging failed masculinities. Narratives of "queer suicide" within the secular West have often turned around stories of young, gay American men who kill themselves after experiencing bullying. Failed Orientalist masculinities support idealized secular white upper-class masculinities while disavowing repressed same-sex male desire. In the case of James Rodemeyer, one can consider the emphasis on the visual that expresses a passionate hatred toward the non-normative gendered male body. Similarly, the gaze that is directed toward the Muslim male body through *The Guantanamo Files* is one of a perverse desire to look that is as much imbued with rage as it is with desire.[29] The ambivalent longing to conquer the male body in acts of violence and lust is displaced onto ambiguities of looking.

I'm Not a Terrorist, But I Play One on TV: Racism and Cyberspace

The rise of an Internet-based citizenry meets its radical opposite, using technologies of surveillance to police the borders of nations. Žižek suggests that the openness of the Internet might lead to forms of radical closure. He writes,

> the Real whose contours loom on the horizon of the cyberspace universe: the moment of implosion when humanity will attain the limit that is impossible to transgress; the moment at which the coordinates of our societal life-world will be dissolved. At that moment, distances will be suspended (I will be able to communicate instantly through teleconferences with any place on the globe); all information, from texts to music to video, will be instantly available on my interface.[30]

He goes on to question the "interface," suggesting that limitless contact with others via cyberspace might be met with an increased fear of the Real. He writes,

> the obverse of this suspension of the distance [that] separates me from a faraway foreigner is that, due to the gradual disappearance of contact with "real" bodily others, a neighbor will no longer be a neighbor, since he or she will be progressively replaced by a screen specter; general availability will induce unbearable claustrophobia; excess of choice will be experienced as the impossibility to choose; universal direct participatory community will exclude all the more forcefully those who are prevented from participating in it.[31]

We live with increased forms of border security, the pushing of veiled Muslim women out of public space, and growing forms of often publically pronounced

xenophobia. At the same moment, we have *The Guantanamo Files*, which offers the illusion of free-floating information that crosses borders. Žižek writes,

> the virtualization cancels the distance between a neighbor and a distant foreigner, in so far as it suspends the presence of the Other in the massive weight of the Real: neighbors and foreigners are all equal in their spectral screen presence.[32]

Drawing on Freud, Žižek discusses the traumatic effect of the neighbor as lying in their unbearable *jouissance*. It is the bodily presence of the Other that is menacing for the racist subject. He sees the virtualization of the body of the other as supporting the return of virulent racism, writing,

> And what is contemporary "postmodern" racism if not a violent reaction to this virtualization of the Other, a return of the experience of the neighbor in his or her (or their) intolerable, traumatic *presence.* The feature [that] disturbs the racist in his Other (the way they laugh, the smell of their food . . .) is thus precisely the little piece of the Real that bears witness to their presence beyond the symbolic order.[33]

The Muslim body is held at bay through technologies of war, border security, and torture, while sites like *The Guantanamo Files* use technology in banal ways to offer an illusion of openness toward the body marked as radically Other.

Conclusion: Of Ticking Time Bombs and Clicking Keys

Žižek often uses the following image to describe the moment of realization that disrupts the seamless work of ideology. He writes,

> Recall the classic cartoon scene of a character who simply continues over the edge of the precipice, ignoring the fact that there is no longer ground under their feet—they fall down only when they look and notice they're hanging over an abyss.[34]

The race of capitalist secular modernity, increasingly powered by Google, drives conservative capitalist aims as much as it drives left-leaning attempts to share information. The form that the sharing of empathetic narratives regarding subjective violence takes is expressed through objectively violent structures that support what Alain Badiou might call "the worldless space of capital."[35] The subjective violence of captive prisoners in Guantanamo Bay meets the objective violence of captive Internet users trapped by sites such as *The Guantanamo Files.* The perverse spectacle of imprisoned, tortured bodies, which can be disseminated infinitely through cyberspace, is obscene in its banality and effective as a tool that allows the public to engage in the illusion of "digital citizenship," which does little to stop the waging of war. Racing across Google maps and through Internet screens while constructing religious Others in and

from the global South as "terrors" who threaten our supposed civility, one should perhaps look to see the hollow nature of the political that lies beneath a sea of information with little means to take action. The terror of late secular capitalism is perhaps not the fantastical explosion of bombs, but the banal key clicks that disseminate paranoid narratives at a rapid speed, which can prevent one from thinking. While there is often an uncritical celebration of the Internet as a tool that is a necessary good within leftist politics, perhaps one should consider how struggles that are waged solely online might support a rhetoric of capitalist "progress" that is antithetical to leftist politics. As Žižek suggests, "The task of the leftist thinker today is, to quote Walter Benjamin, not to ride the train of history, but to pull the brake"[36]

Notes

1. Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002), 11.
2. In the interests of space, I have not offered the reader a detailed description of *The Guantanamo Files* and focused rather on analysis and critique.
3. The site can be found here: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/guantanamo-files. Accessed May 30, 2013.
4. Slavoj Žižek. *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997).
5. Slavoj Žižek, "Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism," *New Left Review* I/225 (September-October 1997).
6. Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 114.
7. Ibid.
8. Slavoj Žižek, "The Neighbor in Burka". *The Symptom* 11 (Spring 2012) Online edition, accessed May 30, 2013, http://www.lacan.com/symptom11/?p=69.
9. Ibid.
10. For further readings regarding anxieties surrounding veiled Muslim women's bodies see Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Gender and Secularism of Modernity: How Can a Muslim Woman Be French?" *Feminist Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2 (Summer, 2006), 239–255. Annelies Moors and Ruba Salih "Muslim women in Europe: Secular Normativities, Bodily Performances, and Multiple Publics," *Social Anthropology Special Issue: Muslim Women in Europe,* vol. 17, no. 4 (November 2009): 375–378, http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/soca.2009.17.issue-4/issuetoc
11. Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Picador, 2009), 63.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 14.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. In *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections,* Žižek further discusses the relationship between violence and language. Žižek rewrites Adorno's famous comment that after Auschwitz no poetry is possible. Rather, he suggests that after Auschwitz only poetry is possible. He asserts that the traumatic events resist full, linear representation in language and instead the truth of trauma perhaps lies in how it resists that factual, rational narrative. In this regard, one can ask how the scientific ordering of war in fact resists the real bodily and emotional violence done to detainees.
17. Ibid.

18. Slavoj Žižek, *Violence*, 3.

19. A great deal of excellent writing has been produced regarding the role that Internet technologies play in social movements. While this piece is critical of the role technology plays in the war on terror, there are obviously subversive uses of Internet technology that have radically changed political organizing and subjectivity for the better. For example, see Rosi Braidotti, "Cyberfeminism with a Difference," http://www.let.uu.nl/womens_studies/rosi/cyberfem.htm. Accessed October 2011. See also Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, "Value and Affect," *boundary 2,* vol. 26, no. 2 (Summer, 1999), pp. 77–88; Antonio Negri, "Art and Culture in the Age of Empire and the Time of Multitudes," *SubStance*112, vol. 36, no. 1, (2007): 48–55. Raqs Media Collective, *Seepage,* (Sternberg Press: Berlin, 2010).

20. For a more detailed discussion regarding the relationship between technology, torture, and the war on terror see Susan Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others," *New York Times,* 2004.

21. For further references regarding the gendered nature of representations of "terrorism" in the mainstream Western media, see Anne Norton, "Gender, Sexuality, and the Iraq of Our Imagination" (Washington DC, 2009) http://ns2.merip.org/mer/mer173/gender-sexuality-iraq-our-imagination, accessed May 30 2013; Claudia Brunner, "Occidentalism Meets the Female Suicide Bomber: A Critical Reflection on Recent Terrorism Debates; A Review Essay," *Signs* vol. 32, no. 4, *War and Terror I: Raced-Gendered Logics and Effects in Conflict Zones: Special Issue,* eds. Mary Hawkesworth and Karen Alexander (Summer 2007): 957–71; Usamah Ansari, "'Should I Go and Pull Her Burqa Off?': Feminist Compulsions, Insider Consent, and a Return to Kandahar," *Critical Studies in Media Communication,* vol. 25, no. 1 (2008)

22. For a more detailed discussion regarding the relationship between technology, torture and the "war on terror" see Susan Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others." *The New York Times,* 2004.

23. Slavoj Žižek "Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism" in *New Left Review* 225, 1997, pp. 44–5.

24. Žižek cites the work of Etienne Balibar who discusses two parallel and complimentary forms of subjective and objective violence generated by contemporary capitalist ideology. He writes, "Etienne Balibar, in *La Crainte des masses* (1997), distinguishes the two opposite but complementary modes of excessive violence in today's capitalism: the objective (structural) violence that is inherent in the social conditions of global capitalism (the automatic creation of excluded and dispensable individuals, from the homeless to the unemployed), and the subjective violence of newly emerging ethnic and/or religious (in short: racist) fundamentalisms." In this regard one can ask how the subjective violence of multinational Internet companies such as Google and other Internet conglomerates corresponds to the figure of the Guantanamo prisoner in sites such as *The Guantanamo Files*. The subjective violence of technological capital and Western spectatorship runs parallel to the detention and torture of those deems to be "terrorists." See Slavoj Žižek, "Nobody has to be vile," *London Review of Books,* vol. 28, no. 7 (April 6, 2006): http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n07/slavoj-zizek/nobody-has-to-be-vile. Accessed May 31, 2013.

25. Slavoj Žižek, "What Rumsfield Doesn't Know That He Knows About Iraq," *In These Times*, May 2004, http://www.lacan.com/zizekrumsfeld.htm. Accessed August 26, 2013.

26. Ibid.
27. Žižek, 2005, 10.
28. Žižek, 2006, 66.
29. Žižek, 2006, 66.
30. For a more in-depth discussion regarding the relationship between hatred and desire within colonial and Orientalist discourse see Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1997) and Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism* (New York: Routledge, 1996). Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race*. London: Routledge, 1995.
31. Žižek, 2006, 154.
32. Žižek, 2006, 154.
33. Žižek, 2006, 154.
34. Žižek, 2006, 155.
35. Slavoj Žižek: Interview. Sean O'Hagan, *The Observer*, Sunday, June 27, 2010, http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2010/jun/27/slavoj-zizek-living-end-times. Accessed August 26, 2013.
36. See Alain Badiou, *Philosophy for Militants* (London: Verso, 2012).
37. Ibid.

Appendix: Art

Staging Feminine Hysteria: Schoenberg's *Erwartung*

By Slavoj Žižek

When Anton Webern proposed Arnold Schoenberg write the music for a concert in Barcelona, Schoenberg replied, "I have made many friends here who have never heard my works but who play tennis with me. What will they think of me when they hear my horrible dissonances?"[1] All Schoenberg is here: the awareness of his radical breakthrough mixed with ironic kindness. There was no envy in him—Schoenberg was Gershwin's friend and he enjoyed meeting U.S. commercial composers. And he was right: his breakthrough was unbearably shattering. It was a key part of the modernist breakthrough, the only true artistic Event of the twentieth century (whatever it is, postmodernism is not an Event).

In his *Philosophy of History*, Hegel provided a wonderful characterization of Thucydides's book on the Peloponnesian War. "[H]is immortal work is the absolute gain [that] humanity has derived from that contest."[2] One should read this judgment in all its naïvety: in a way, from the standpoint of the world history, the Peloponnesian War took place so that Thucydides could write a book on it. What if something similar holds for the relationship between the explosion of modernism and the First World War, but in the opposite direction? WWI was *not* the traumatic break that shattered late nineteenth-century progressivism, but a reaction to the *true* threat to the established order: the explosion of vanguard art, scientific and political, that undermined the established world view (artistic modernism in literature—from Kafka to Joyce; in music—Schoenberg and Stravinsky, in painting—Picasso, Malevitch, Kandinsky; psychoanalysis, relativity theory, and quantum physics, the rise of social democracy . . .). This rupture—condensed in 1913, the *anus mirabilis* of the artistic vanguard—was so shattering in its opening of new spaces that, in a speculative historiography, one is even tempted to claim that the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 was, from the "spiritual" standpoint, a reaction to this Event of rupture—or, to paraphrase Hegel, the horror of the World War I is the price humanity had to pay for waging the immortal artistic revolution of the

years just prior to the war. In other words, one has to turn around the pseudo-deep insight on how Schoenberg et al. prefigured horrors of twentieth-century war: what if the true Event was 1913? It is crucial to focus on this intermediate explosive moment between the complacency of the late nineteenth century and the catastrophe of WWI—1914 was not the awakening from slumber, but the forceful and violent return of the patriotic sleep destined to block the true awakening. The fact that fascists and other patriots hated the vanguard *entartete Kunst* is not a marginal detail but a key feature of fascism.

Nothing encapsulates more forcefully the violent impact of the vanguard rupture than the (in)famous *Skandalkonzert* of March 31, 1913, a concert of the *Wiener Konzertverein* conducted by Schoenberg. Here is the program: Webern's *Six Pieces for Orchestra*, Zemlinsky's *Four Orchestral Songs on Poems by Maeterlinck,* Schoenberg's *Chamber Symphony No. 1*, Berg's *Five Orchestral Songs on Postcard Texts of Peter Altenberg*, and Mahler's "Now the sun wants to rise as brightly" (No. 1 from the *Kindertotenlieder*). However, Mahler's song was not performed since the concert ended prematurely: it was during Berg's songs that the fighting began, with the audience calling for both poet and composer to be committed to the asylum.

Schoenberg's *Chamber Symphony* performed at the event was composed seven years earlier, in 1906, but the work that stands for his musical revolution is *Erwartung* (*Op. 17*, composed in 1909). *Erwartung* is a double Event, maximal and minimal. First, it is a mega-event in the history of music: nothing remained the same after *Erwartung*; the coordinates of the entire musical landscape were transformed. However, one should not forget that *Erwartung* simultaneously renders a minimal Event, a barely perceptive subjective shift in the depicted "inner life" of the protagonist. This half-hour one-act opera—or, rather, a monologue for solo soprano accompanied by a large orchestra—to a libretto by Marie Pappenheim was premiered in 1924 in Prague, conducted by Alexander Zemlinsky. Marie Pappenheim studied medicine, but both her brother and her future husband were psychoanalysts; furthermore, her second cousin, Bertha Pappenheim, was treated for hysteria by Joseph Breuer—she is the famous "Anna O," the subject of the first case study presented in Breuer's and Freud's *Studies on Hysteria*.

Although there is a big tradition of hysterical woman in late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century music, starting with Kundry from Wagner's *Parsifal* and continuing in Strauss's *Salome* and *Electra* as well as the Chosen One in Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, in all these cases the theme of the hysterical madwoman is "camouflaged with the exotic trappings of antiquity (classical, biblical, primitive), . . . distancing it from its uncomfortable contemporary relevance. Schoenberg and Pappenheim gave it a raw, unvarnished treatment that laid its social and psychological message bare."[3] This brings us back to the tension between Pappenheim's original libretto (a Freudian case rooted in social reality) and Schoenberg's version of it (rendering a pure inner delirium with no social roots). The double trap to be avoided here is to privilege

one of the two versions: either to claim that Schoenberg provides an aesthetic-irrationalist mystification of Pappenheim's socially situated case of hysteria, or to dismiss Pappenheim's libretto as a boring realist report that becomes a work of art only through Schoenberg's purification.

The link of *Erwartung* with feminine hysteria is a commonplace—but how exactly are we to define it? Behind this reference to hysteria, there are two different, although connected, phenomena. First, there is the artistic line from the mid-nineteenth century (Wagner, pre-Raphaelites, Strindberg). Second, there is the Freudian psychoanalysis, which began as the analysis of hysterical patients ("Dora," Freud's first great case study, not to mention "Anna O"). Jacques Lacan rendered the division that characterizes the hysterical feminine subject in a concise formula: "I demand that you refuse my demand, since this is not that." When, for example, Wagner's Kundry seduces Parsifal, she actually wants him to resist her advances. Doesn't this obstruction, this sabotage of her own intent, testify to a dimension in her that resists the domination of the phallus?

The male dread of woman, which so deeply branded the zeitgeist at the turn of the century, from Edvard Munch and August Strindberg up to Franz Kafka, thus reveals itself as the dread of feminine inconsistency: feminine hysteria, which traumatized these men (and also marked the birthplace of psychoanalysis), confronted them with an inconsistent multitude of masks (a hysterical woman immediately moves from desperate pleas to cruel, vulgar derision, etc.). What causes such uneasiness is the impossibility of discerning behind the masks a consistent subject manipulating them: behind the multiple layers of masks is nothing; or, at the most, nothing but the shapeless, mucous stuff of the life-substance. Suffice it to mention Edvard Munch's encounter with hysteria, which left such a deep mark upon him:

> In 1893 Munch was in love with the beautiful daughter of an Oslo wine merchant. She clung to him, but he was afraid of such a tie and anxious about his work, so he left her. One stormy night a sailing-boat came to fetch him: the report was that the young woman was on the point of death and wanted to speak to him for the last time. Munch was deeply moved and, without question, went to her home, where he found her lying on a bed between two lighted candles. But when he approached her bed, she rose and started to laugh: the whole scene was nothing but a hoax. Munch turned and began to leave; at that point, she threatened to shoot herself if he left her; and drawing a revolver, she pointed it at her breast. When Munch bent to wrench the weapon away, convinced that this too was only part of the game, the gun went off and wounded him in the hand.[4]

Here we encounter hysterical theater at its purest: the subject is caught in a masquerade in which what appears to be deadly serious reveals itself as fraud (dying), and what appears to be an empty gesture reveals itself as deadly serious (the threat of suicide). The panic that seizes the (male) subject confronting this theater expresses a dread that behind the many masks, which fall away

from each other like the layers of an onion, there is nothing, no ultimate feminine secret.

This is what makes hysteria so unbearable: neither the primordially unconscious "irrationality" of the woman (on what Schoenberg's music focuses) nor the feminine confusion as a reaction to the pressure exerted by the patriarchal order (on what Pappenheim's libretto focuses). The narrative content of the *Erwartung* libretto is minimal. In the first three shorter scenes, nothing happens but the Woman's incomprehensible rambling; only at the beginning of Scene 4 do elements of narrative content emerge—indications of her lover's infidelity, an accident on her journey to a house, another woman prevents her entering the house: "And they won't let me in there . . . The unknown woman will drive me away . . . And with him so ill . . ." When she stumbles upon the corpse of her lover, she struggles with disbelief, shocked by her discovery; it later becomes clear that she was the killer:

> No, that isn't the shadow of the bench . . . Someone is there . . . He isn't breathing . . . Moist . . . something is flowing here . . . It shines red . . . Oh, it's my hands, they are torn and bleeding . . . No, it's still wet, it's from there . . . /*She tries with terrible exertion to drag the object forward.*/ I can't do it . . . It's him.

Her inability to grasp the reality of her lover's murder predictably indicates her hysterical condition; it is only after she finds the strength to accept and integrate the knowledge of her lover's faithlessness that her thoughts become more focused and her emotions less malleable—she forgives and expresses compassion for his faithlessness, arriving at a full awareness of her self-deceit:

> My dear . . . my only darling . . . did you kiss her often? . . . while I was dying with longing. Did you love her very much? Don't say yes . . . You smile painfully . . . Maybe you too have suffered . . . maybe your heart called out for her . . . Is it your fault? . . . Oh, I cursed you . . . but your compassion made me happy . . . I believed . . . I was happy.

It is true that the Woman does not achieve the complete resolution of her psychic deadlock: at the opera's end, she again becomes dissociated, resuming her search as the opera concludes; however, there is a minimal event—a subjective reversal—just before the end, the acceptance of crime. One should hear the difference between Pappenheim's original libretto and the libretto effectively used by Schoenberg. Pappenheim's original libretto is basically a realistic narrative that locates the hysterical woman into a clear social context: abandoned by her lover, she kills him, and the horror of this act makes her lose her contact with reality and engage in hallucinations; only gradually does she become aware of what she did and reconnects with reality. Through numerous deletions (of references to actual events and circumstances), Schoenberg transformed a coherent realistic narrative of hysteria with clear feminist tendency

into an illogical nightmarish hallucination unconstrained by external reality. Two questions have to be raised here: why this link between the atonal music and psychoanalysis, and why does Schoenberg nonetheless attempt to transform a clinical case into a self-contained portrait of hysterical hallucination? The answer to the first question seems obvious:

> Freud's findings held particular promise for Expressionist artists seeking to eradicate ornamentation, superficial obedience to established forms, and surface prettiness from their works. The revelation that there existed an unconscious mind, replete with images, feelings, and desires, obeying only its own labyrinthine logic . . . It is not surprising that Schoenberg found *Erwartung*'s hysterical Woman an ideal subject for his leap into the world of the unconscious mind. The quest to access subliminal realms of thought and experience had augmented a widespread fascination with hysterics, for whom the barriers between conscious and unconscious mind had fractured.[5]

The answer to the second question is that Schoenberg's transformation of the original libretto is founded in his aim to liberate music from imitating external reality: "Kandinsky viewed line and color as emotional effects and removed them from their descriptive function. Schoenberg does similar things with his music, which mirrors the extremely expressive content of the text."[6] In other words, we remain within the space of mimesis, what changes is just the object imitated: in the same way that nonfigurative painting tries to render directly the inner spiritual-affective reality, bypassing external reality, Schoenberg wanted his music to also render directly this same spiritual-affective reality. In contrast to the traditional art, which functions as a *mimesis* of external reality, the authentic modern art should bypass the detour through external reality and function as a direct *mimesis* of inner life, a "representation of inner occurrences"[7]—and, here enters psychoanalysis: this inner life, not yet contaminated by external reality, is unconscious, or "art must express the instinctive and the inborn, the part of ourselves that is wholly unconscious and uncorrupted by convention."[8]

If, then, in a famous letter to Kandinsky, Schoenberg emphatically asserted that "art belongs to the *unconscious*,"[9] this unconscious is the irrational and hallucinatory unconscious, the unconscious of the psychic "inner life," the confused and incoherent flow of ideas, passions, affects—in short, the psychological unconscious of the absolute immanence of psychic life, which is, as such, *de facto* indistinguishable from the stream of consciousness itself. Is, however, this unconscious the Freudian unconscious? Did Lacan not demonstrate that the Freudian unconscious is not psychological, the unconscious of the irrational flow, of spontaneous inner life, but, on the contrary, quite literally metapsychological: a symbolic structure.

Lacan started his "return to Freud" with the linguistic reading of the entire psychoanalytic edifice, encapsulated by what is perhaps his single best-known formula: "the unconscious is structured as a language." The predominant

perception of the unconscious is that it is the domain of irrational drives, something opposed to the rational conscious self. For Lacan, this notion of the unconscious belongs to the Romantic *Lebensphilosophie* (philosophy of life) and has nothing to do with Freud. The Freudian unconscious caused such a scandal not because of the claim that the rational self is subordinated to the much vaster domain of blind irrational instincts, but because it demonstrated how the unconscious itself obeys its own grammar and logic—the unconscious talks and thinks. The unconscious is not the reservoir of wild drives that has to be conquered by the ego, but the site where a traumatic truth speaks. Therein resides Lacan's version of Freud's motto *wo es war, soll ich werden* (where it was, I shall become): not "the ego should conquer the id," the site of the unconscious drives, but "I should dare to approach the site of my truth." What awaits me "there" is not a deep Truth I have to identify with, but an unbearable truth I have to learn to live with:

> The unconscious is neither the primordial nor the instinctual, and what it knows of the elemental is no more than the elements of the signifier . . . The intolerable scandal when Freudian sexuality was not yet holy was that it was so "intellectual." It was in this respect that it showed itself to be the worthy stooge of all those terrorists whose plots were going to ruin society.[10]

The unconscious Reason is, of course, not the coherent structure of the conscious thought processes, but a complex network of particular links organized along the lines of condensation, displacement, and so on, full of pragmatic and opportunistic compromises—something is rejected, but not quite, since it returns in a cyphered mode; it is rationally accepted, but isolated/neutralized in its full symbolic weight. We thus get a mad dance of distortions that follow no clear univocal logic, but form a patchwork of improvised connections. Recall the legendary case of the forgetting of the name Signorelli from Freud's *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*: Freud couldn't recall the name (Signorelli) of the painter of the Orvieto frescos and produced as substitutes the names of two other painters, Botticelli and Boltraffio; and his analysis brings to light the processes of signifying associations that linked Signorelli to Botticelli and Boltraffio (the Italian village Trafoi was where he received the message of the suicide of one of his patients, struggling with sexual problems; *Herr*, the German word for Mister—*Signor*—is linked to a trip to Herzegowina, where an old Muslim told Freud that after one can no longer engage in sex, there is no reason to go on living.).

The complex rhizomatic texture of such associations and displacements has no clear triadic structure with a clear final resolution, the result of the tension between "thesis" (the name Signorelli) and "antithesis" (its forgetting) is the compromise-formation of falsely remembering two other names in which (and this is their crucial feature) the dimension on account of which Freud was unable to remember Signorelli (the link between sex and death) returns in an

even more conspicuous way. The Freudian unconscious is thus an inconsistent totality in which a moment condenses (*verdichten*) a multiplicity of associative causal chains, so that its explicit "obvious" meaning is here to conceal the true repressed one.

What would Hegel have made of Freud's dream on Irma's injection, whose interpretation unearths a kind of *superposition* of multiple interpretive lines (getting rid of the guilt for the failure of Irma's treatment; the wish to be like the primordial father who possesses all the women; etc.)? What would Hegel have said about a dream in which the remains of the day (*Tagesreste*) are connected to the core of the dream only through verbal or similar marginal associations? What would he have said about a dream of a woman patient ("Her husband asked her: 'Don't you think we ought to have the piano tuned?' And she replied: 'It's not worthwhile.'"), where the clue is provided by the presumed mental occurrence of the same fragment of speech in a previous analytic session during which she had suddenly caught hold of her jacket, one of the buttons having come undone, as though she were saying, "Please don't look (at my breasts); *it's not worthwhile*." There is no notional unity here between the two levels (the dream scene and the accident during the previous session); what connects them is just a signifying bridge.

How does the unconscious Schoenberg refers to relate to the "oceanic" aesthetic unconscious prevalent in the great tradition of the nineteenth century, which begins with Schopenhauer, whose peak is Wagner's *Tristan* and whose last great expression is Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, the unconscious of the oceanic feeling, of self-obliteration of subjectivity in the immense sea of the primordial formless abyss? Let's proceed step by step.

Jacques Rancière, who elaborated the opposition between the Freudian unconscious (which is, as we have just seen, thoroughly "rational," the articulation of a strategy to deal with specific traumatic experiences: the Freudian formations of the unconscious are encoded messages to be deciphered) and the aesthetic unconscious, perspicuously noted that Freud's rejection of this aesthetic unconscious also accounts for the (sometimes embarrassingly naive) psychologically realistic character of his interpretations of the works of art: he is not interested in textual details that subvert the narrative or the topic (content) of a work; what he does is either to treat a person from literary fiction as a real clinical case or to interpret the work of art as a symptom of the artist's pathology.

Rancière's thesis has to be supplemented on three counts. He writes that the discovery of the death drive is "an episode in Freud's long and often disguised confrontation with the great obsessive theme of the epoch in which psychoanalysis was formed, the unconscious of the Schopenhauerian thing-in-itself and the great literary fictions of return to this unconscious."[11] Freud's numerous literary and art analyses were thus "so many ways of resisting the nihilist entropy that Freud detects and rejects in the works of the aesthetic regime of art, but that he will also legitimize in his theorization of the death drive."[12] But

one can easily show (as Lacan did in a very convincing way) that the Freudian death drive is not his term for the Schopenhauerian striving for self-annihilation, for joining the primordial abyss, but, quite the contrary, a radical compulsion-to-repeat that persists "beyond life and death." Freud invented the death drive in order to posit a libidinal force that, precisely, runs against the "nihilist entropy."

This point is linked to the second correction: Rancière is too fast in identifying today's predominant "textual" psychoanalytic dealing with art and literature as a continuation of the Schopenhauerian self-dissolution in the primordial abyss. One can demonstrate how modernism proper enacts precisely a break with this late Romantic topic. Although both the Romantic poetry of the "eternal Night" and the modernist formalism oppose the traditional representative narrative logic, they undermine it from opposite directions: Romanticism asserts the force of the "nihilist entropy" that dissolves the structures of narrative representation, while modernism insists on formal details that display a structure of their own, at a distance from narrative representation, but also opposed to self-annihilation in the "eternal sea." These formal details that insist independently of the narrative representation are more like the Freudian death drive, an insistence beyond the cycle of "life and death" rendered by the narrative—only in this way can Freudian theory be linked to modern art.

Third and last point: can Wagner's Romanticism really be reduced to the nihilist entropy? With Romanticism, music changes its role: it is no longer a mere accompaniment of the message delivered in speech, it contains/renders a message of its own, "deeper" than the one delivered in words. It was Rousseau who first clearly articulated this expressive potential of music as such, when he claimed that, instead of merely imitating the affective features of verbal speech, music should be given the right to "speak for itself"—in contrast to the deceiving verbal speech, in music, it is, to paraphrase Lacan, the truth itself that speaks. As Schopenhauer put it, music directly enacts/renders the noumenal Will, while speech remains limited to the level of phenomenal representation. Music is the substance that renders the true heart of the subject, which is what Hegel called the "Night of the World," the abyss of radical negativity: music becomes the bearer of the true message beyond words with the shift from the Enlightenment subject of rational *logos* to the Romantic subject of the "night of the world," in other words, with the shift of the metaphor for the kernel of the subject from Day to Night. Here we encounter the Uncanny: no longer the external transcendence, but, following Kant's transcendental turn, the excess of the Night in the very heart of the subject (the dimension of the Undead), what Tomlison called the "internal otherworldliness that marks the Kantian subject."[13] What music renders is no longer the "semantics of the soul," but the underlying "noumenal" flux of *jouissance* beyond the linguistic meaningfulness. This noumenal is radically different from the pre-Kantian transcendent divine Truth: it is the inaccessible excess that forms the very core of the subject.

After such a celebration of musicality, one cannot but agree with Vladimir Nabokov when he characterizes the ideal state as the one in which there is "no torture, no executions, and no music."[14] Effectively, the line of separation between the sublime and the ridiculous, between a noble act and a pathetic empty gesture, is ultimately untraceable. Recall the beginning of the first movement of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*: was there ever a more succinct declaration of the resolute stance, the stubborn stance of the uncompromising will to enact one's decision?[15] However, is it not that, if one just barely shifts the perspective, the same gesture cannot but appear as a ridiculous gesturing, a hysterical waving with hands that betrays the fact that we are effectively dealing with an imposture? What if we read the stance of the first movement not as dignity, but as the *obstinacy* of the "undead" drive? What this oscillation of ours means is that there is no kitsch in itself: what Bartok achieves in his "Concerto for Orchestra" is to *redeem* the ultimate kitsch melody from Lehar's "The Merry Widow"—the quoting of Lehar is in no way meant ironically, since, by quoting it in a different context, it de-fetishizes it, providing us with proper musical environs out of which this beautiful melody emerges "organically." Luckily, however, the problem with this expressive potential of music is that, brought to its conclusion, to the end, it cancels itself: when we progress to the very core of the subject, we encounter the fantasmatic kernel of enjoyment that can no longer be subjectivized, effectively assumed by the subject—the subject can only stare, with a cold transfixed gaze, at this kernel, unable to fully recognize himself in it. Recall "der Laienmann," the last song of Schubert's *Winterreise*: at the very highpoint of despair, emotions are frozen, we are back at the nonexpressive mechanism, the subject is reduced to the utter despair of mimicking the automatism of mechanical music.

This clarification of the Freudian unconscious brings us back to *Erwartung*, more precisely, to the passage from atonality to dodecaphony. *Erwartung* was written in 1909, after the leap into pure atonality but before Schoenberg had begun to work out his twelve-tone ideas in a systematic way. The commonplace is that the passage from atonality to dodecaphony is the shift from extreme expressionism (music abandoning all pre-established fixed formal constrains in order to render as directly as possible the innermost unconscious subjective truth) to its opposite extreme, to "a haven for technical research and compositional tours de force . . . twelve-tone composers went further than any others in ordering the content of their work according to rational structural principles, making content in effect tantamount to form."[16] Even Adorno agrees with this commonplace, reading the passage from atonality to dodecaphony as a dialectical reversal of expression into external mechanical order. Here, however, Lacan's notion of the Unconscious "structured like language" regains its pertinence: the passage from atonality to dodecaphony is thus not the passage from the depths of irrational unconscious to a new form of consciously planned rationality, but the passage from the chaotic flux of consciousness to the real unconscious.

Tonality—atonality—dodecaphony thus form a good old Hegelian triad, but not only in the simplistic sense that atonality negates tonality and then dodecaphony negates the negation and introduces a new positive order; they do this in a much more precise and interesting way. Tonality is first negated in the terms of the old musical order, due to its mimetic inadequacy: the reproach is that it doesn't render faithfully the inner psychic reality of man, and the shift to atonality is justified in the terms of extreme expressionism, as the only way to follow the inner stream. Then only, the very mimetic principle is abandoned and the new radical de-psychologized formal order (dodecaphony) is imposed—or, in Lacan's terms, Schoenberg finally learned that the Unconscious is outside, not in the depths of our souls.

What ordinary listeners perceive in atonal music is a lack of melody; however, the situation is more complex, since the nineteenth-century predominance of melody is already a sign of the decline of harmonic relationships: "It is certainly true that melody was the principal basis of form in all nineteenth-century music after the death of Beethoven, but that was because harmonic relationships no longer possessed the force and influence they had throughout the eighteenth century."[17] The composer whose work bears testimony to this decline in an exemplary way is Tchaikovsky, the indisputable melodic talent who was well aware of his weakness in deploying the texture of a large musical form.

For a European classical music elitist educated in the tradition of Adorno, the name Tchaikovsky cannot but give rise to the Josepf Goebbels reaction of drawing a gun—Tchaikovsky stands for the lowest kitsch, comparable only to Sibelius or Rachmaninov. However, as Daniel Gregory Mason put it succinctly, Tchaikovsky "has the merits of his defects": not only was he aware of his limitations and weak points; his (few) truly great moments paradoxically grew out of these defects. He admitted that he can "seldom sustain a whole movement at the height of its greatest passages"—a problem not only for him but for most Romantics up to Elgar. Berlioz made a well-known vicious quip that Mendelssohn's melodies usually begin well but finish badly, losing their drive and ending in a "mechanical" resolution (see his *Fingal's Cave* overture or the first movement of the Violin Concerto). Far from being a sign of Mendelssohn's weakness as a composer, this failure of the melodic line rather bears witness to his sensitivity toward a historical change: those who were still able to write "beautiful melodies" were kitsch composers like Tchaikovsky. Tchaikovsky approaches true art not in his numerous "beautiful melodies," but when a melodic line is thwarted. At the very beginning of *Onegin*, in the brief orchestral prelude, the short melodic motif ("Tatyana's theme") is not properly developed but merely repeated in different modes, fully retaining its isolated character of a melodic fragment, not even a full melodic line. There is a genuine melancholic flavor in such a repetition, which registers and displays the underlying impotence, the failure of proper development.

Maybe Schoenberg was too dismissive of pseudo-atonal composers in whose predominantly tonal works one can discern echoes and traces of the

atonal revolution. Here are two surprising examples from none other than Shostakovich (maybe the third in the series of Those Whose Name . . .). In his key symphonies (5, 8, and 10), the longest movement is always the first one whose inner logic follows something quite different from the sonata form: the movement begins with a strong thesis, a Beethoven-esque proud assertion of strength in pain, which then gradually morphs into a withdrawal toward another spiritual/etheric dimension—it is, paradoxically, this very withdrawal that generates an unbearable tension. Furthermore, there is an opposite movement in Shostakovich's work: David Hurwitz noted as one of Shostakovich's procedures he learned from Mahler the "technique of brutalizing a former lyrical melody"[18]—say, in the development of the first movement of his Fifth Symphony, its principal theme, a lyric descending phrase on violins over a string accompaniment, is repeated as a grotesque, goose-stepping march, with cymbals, trumpets, snare drum, and timpani.

Schoenberg's passage from pure atonality to dodecaphony is thus necessitated by the immanent deadlock of atonality. *Erwartung* is praised by Charles Rosen as "the quintessential Expressionist work"—Schoenberg himself wrote, "In *Erwartung* the aim is to represent in slow motion everything that occurs during a single second of maximum spiritual excitement, stretching it out to half an hour." However, such a radical approach soon reveals its immanent limitations. With the rise of atonality,

> it seemed as if music now had to be written note by note; only chains of chromatic or whole-tone scales were possible, and these only sparingly. The renunciation of the symmetrical use of blocks of elements in working out musical proportions placed the weight on the smallest units, single intervals, short motifs. The expressive values of these tiny elements therefore took on an inordinate significance: they replaced syntax . . . And since they took a preponderant role in composition it was obvious that a composer would choose elements with the most powerful, even the most violent values, as these small elements now had to do the work of much larger groups. The relation between the violence and morbidity of emotional expression and the formal changes of style is therefore not fortuitous.[19]

In a truly materialist formalism, one should thus turn around the relationship between form and content, following Fred Jameson's famous analysis of Hemingway in which he pointed out that Hemingway did not write short terse sentences in order to render the isolated heroic individuality of his heroes—form comes first, he invented the isolated heroic individuality to be able to write in a certain way. And the same goes for Schoenberg: he did not make the fateful step to atonality to be able to express in music the extremes of morbid hysterical violence; he chose the topic of hysteria because it fit atonal music.

Philip Friedheim has described *Erwartung* as Schoenberg's "only lengthy work in an athematic style," where no musical material returns once stated over the course of 426 measures. As such, as a case of pure atonality, *Erwartung* is a *hapax*, like the square of Malevitch, something that can really be done only

once, the only specimen of its genre. *Erwartung* thus stands for "the extremity of the principle of nonrepetition" and, as such, it confronts us with the obvious problem of pure atonality, insoluble within its space, is, predictably, the problem of large musical forms. On what to base the coherence of a large form when large-scale repetitions and similarities are prohibited? Schoenberg endeavored to resolve this problem with a series of strategies; his first, obvious, option was that, if an atonal work cannot achieve "a purely musical form drawn from the logic of a purely musical material," then the principle of unity has to be sought in "extra-musical material, poetical texts, inner feelings, as if these feelings could in the final result be distinguished from their extraordinary musical incarnation."[20] The problem with this solution is that, when the "extra-musical material" is composed exclusively of inner feelings, these feelings, rendered in their chaotic immanence, are a dispersed inconsistent flow with no organic unity.

Schoenberg resolved a particular sub-aspect of this problem—how to conclude a work when final harmonies are prohibited—with "the filling out of the chromatic space [that] brought about a saturation of the musical space, his substitute for the tonic chord—instead of absolute consonance, we get a state of chromatic plenitude in which every note in the range of the orchestra is played in a kind of glissando."[21] This solution points forward toward the twelve-tone technique (dodecaphony) in which all twelve notes of the chromatic scale are used as often as one another in a piece of music while preventing the emphasis of any one note through the use of tone rows; all twelve notes are thus given more or less equal importance, and the music avoids being in a key. (Schoenberg himself described the system as a "method of composing with twelve tones [that] are related only with one another"—echoing Saussure's notion of differentiality: each tone is only its difference toward the others, so there are only differences with no positive terms.[22] For this reason, Schoenberg didn't like the term "atonality," much preferring "pantonality": while the first term is merely negative, the second one points out how the tonal focus is shifting from one tone to another, so that every tone gets its moment of hegemony. The saturation of the chromatic space thus condenses into a final moment what dodecaphony deploys as—or expands into—a system. While atonality and dodecaphony are both "egalitarian," rejecting any master-tone, dodecaphony is an attempt to solve the problem of how to transform the atonal "egalitarianism" into a new order. In other words, while atonality is the hysterical Event, dodecaphony is the result of the "work of love" in the fidelity to the Event.[23]

Richard Taruskin remarks with acerbic irony that Schoenberg's formula of the "emancipation of dissonances" "has excellent political 'vibes'"[24]: it immediately evokes freedom from an oppressive regime that tried to suppress its inner antagonisms—in other words, it is as if the admission of musical dissonances somehow mirrors the admission of social antagonisms. Taruskin is right to point out that the crucial result of the "emancipation of dissonances" was not the capacity of music to express catastrophic emotions—this capacity

was merely the by-product (or collateral damage, as we use to say today) of "the achievement of a fully integrated musical space in which the 'horizontal' and the 'vertical' dimensions were at last equivalent": as long as composing was constrained by rules of harmony, "'horizontal' ideas like melodies could not always be 'vertically' represented."[25]

There is, however, another option that Schoenberg doesn't shirk from using: playing with the absent tonality itself. For example, he observed that when "a resolution of the two upper notes into consonances according to the rules of tonal harmony appears to be implied by the structure of the chord . . . this allusion to older forms seems to have a satisfying effect even though the resolution does not actually occur."[26] Did Mallarme not practice something homologous with his virtual rhymes? The preceding lines imply that the verse in question will finish with a rhyme, but it doesn't, making the missing word even more present in its absence (like "After my wife dropped dead, I went straight to bed, and decided that till tomorrow, I will not give way to my joy /instead of the expected 'sorrow'/").

Another procedure is directly borrowed from Romanticism: a number of *Erwartung*'s motifs first appear in sketchy fragments and only gradually rise to the surface of the musical texture. Here enters another strange bedfellow whose status is even lower than that of Tchaikovsky, the other One Whose Name Should Not Be Pronounced (among serious classical music lovers): Sibelius. The third movement of Sibelius's fourth symphony offers the exemplary case of his intense relationship toward musical matter/stuff: it is a kind of musical counterpart to the statues of Rodin (or even late Michelangelo) in which the shape of the body painfully, with strenuous effort, endeavors to emerge from the inert captivity of the stone, never quite getting rid of the oppressive weight of material inertia—the great effort of this movement is to give birth to the central motif melodic (melodic line), which occurs only a couple of times toward the end of the movement. The breakthrough of Romanticism resides precisely in rendering the melody proper "impossible," in marking it with a bar of impossibility (the flowering of "beautiful Romantic melodies" is nothing but the kitschy obverse of this fundamental impossibility).

So we have an apparently universal phenomenon (melody) that is, "as such," nonetheless constrained, limited to a precisely defined historical period. What is perhaps the ultimate achievement of expressionist late Romanticism is precisely the notion of the melodic line, of the main motif, as something that has to be "wrought out," sculptured, extracted from the inertia of vocal stuff by means of painful labor: far from functioning as a starting point of a series of variations that then form the main part of the piece, the main musical motif results from the painful perlaboration of the musical matter that forms the main body of the piece. The basic feature of musical Romanticism is thus not the celebration of spiritual longing, but the gradual and painful emergence of a melody out of the struggle with the musical material. In this sense, musical Romanticism is deeply materialist: in Mozart and (most of) Beethoven,

a melody is unproblematically here, simply given as the starting point of its variations, while in Romanticism, the melody only gradually emerges through the struggle with and work on the material. Perhaps, this intense relationship toward the inertia of the stuff/matter is what brings together Sibelius and Tarkovsky, for whom, also, earth, its inert, humid stuff, is not opposed to spirituality but its very medium.

In modernism proper, something even more radical happens: the material itself loses its substantial density and weight. In this respect, the third movement of Sibelius's fourth symphony has to be contrasted to its concluding fourth movement. Each of them renders a specific mode of failure. As we have just discussed, the third movement displays a painful effort to extract the main melody, the effort, which comes to the verge of succeeding two times, yet ultimately fails: "what purports to be the main theme . . . as the movement evolves tries twice to achieve the status of a fully fashioned melody, but backs off each time, first when dissuaded by the return of the opening motif, secondly when crushed by the brass."[27] This failure, this inherent blockage that prevented the ultimate assertion of the melody must have been especially difficult to bear for Sibelius, who is otherwise known for his capacity to build tension slowly and then to release it with the final emergence of the full melodic motif—suffice it to recall the triumphant finales of his second and fifth symphonies.

The fourth movement fails in a much more disturbing way:

> the first part of the finale appears to be on the point of releasing melodic and impulsive generosities, as though the principle of laying longer, more pliable sentences alongside the concentrated thematic nuclei is about to be honored. But it does not come out like that: before long an unnerving process of disintegration begins which by the end has become total and irreconcilable. The last pages die away into a kind of resigned nothingness, with a thrice-repeated figure from a solo oboe as of some mythical creature uttering a cry of infinite loneliness in the frozen wastes of the spirit.[28]

The last part of this appreciation is not only pseudo-poetically awkward, but *stricto sensu* false: what effectively happens in the last part of the finale of Sibelius's fourth is something much more uncanny than the standard expressionist rendering of utterly isolated individual's scream heard by none in the void of empty wasteland. We are rather witnessing a kind of musical cancer or virus triggering the gradual progressive decomposition of the very musical texture— as if the very foundation, the "stuff" of (musical) reality, is losing its consistency; as if, to use another poetic metaphor, the world we live in is gradually losing its colors, its depth, its definite shape, its most fundamental ontological consistency. What happens in the last movement of Sibelius's fourth is thus something homologous to the scene toward the end of Josef Rusnak's *The Thirteenth Floor* (1999), when Hall, the film's hero, drives to a place where he never would have considered going otherwise; at a given point during the trip, he stops the car, seeing how the area and everything within it are replaced with wire-frame

models. He has approached the limit of our world, the domain where our dense reality dissolves into abstract digital coordinates, and he finally grasps the truth: that 1990s Los Angeles—his world—is a simulation . . . So, instead, like the third movement, getting engaged in the struggle to wrest out the melody, the fourth movement begins as if everything is OK, as if the ground is already gained, it promises the full organic deployment of its potentials; what happens then is that the material doesn't resist our effort to mold it properly (as in the third movement)—it rather directly disintegrates, slips out, gradually loses its material substance, turns into a void. We can do anything we want with it, the problem is that the stuff on which we work progressively implodes, collapses, simply fading out. This difference between third and fourth movement is the difference between human and inhuman or, rather, post-human: while the third movement renders the human dimension at its most melancholic, the fourth movement changes the terrain into a dimension beyond in which a post-human mad playfulness coincides with subjective destitution.

In *Erwartung*, the key application of this procedure of gradually building up a motif from its sketchy fragments, as if these fragments are distorted signals coming from the future (the future of the fully formed motif), is a motif which emerges in fully realized form only in the concluding moments of *Erwartung*, at measure 410. The surprising fact is that this motif, which serves "as a *Grundgestalt*, a fundamental musical idea or 'basic shape' that gave coherence to the harmonically nonfunctional ('atonal') musical texture"[29] of *Erwartung*, comes from Schoenberg's earlier *tonal* song "Am Wegrand" (Opus 6), where it is part of its opening phrase.[30] A commonplace psychoanalytic interpretation would have been that it is as though, through free association, the earlier, repressed melody has returned to consciousness—here, psychoanalysis provides not the only topic (feminine hysteria), it affects the musical form itself.[31] However, the enigmatic fact is that it looks as though Schoenberg was pursued by the specter of tonality as he set about the creation of his first atonal works:

> The internalized languages of the past, "something familiar and old established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression," come back to haunt the new emerging language. This process is particularly vivid in music. 'The ghosts of the past become particularly haunting if we live with them on a day-to-day basis. Transposing Freud's thoughts onto a musical sphere, I would say that tonality, the most "heimlich" of musical groundings, becomes increasingly estranged and repressed as Schoenberg and others struggle to surmount it. The glimmerings of tonality that emerge here and there, in varying degrees and in varying intensities throughout Schoenberg's compositional life can well be understood as "unheimlich." The sonorities of tonality have not fully disappeared, they have become estranged, evanescent specters.[32]

It is difficult to miss the irony at work here: the repressed "dream-thought" is *tonal*—so which is the unconscious desire that operates in the song? The amorphous continuity of atonal music was often designated as a kind of stream

of consciousness—but where is here the Unconscious? The atonal flow should function as a direct rendering of the Unconscious, freed from the constraints of the rational conscious speech or tonality—but this unconscious flow itself relates to a tonal fragment as its own unconscious. The atonal flow is rather like the flow of free associations—not primordial, but the conscious chaotic flow out of which interpretation should dig out the unconscious kernel—but, again, is the tonal motif the Unconscious moment here? Freud's analysis of dreams provides a precious key here.

The Freudian unconscious also has a formal aspect and is not merely a matter of content. Recall the cases when Freud interprets a dream so that what is repressed/excluded from its content returns as a feature of the form of this dream (in a dream about pregnancy, the fact that the dreamer is not sure who the father is articulates itself in the guise of the uncertainty about what was the dream about); furthermore, Freud emphasizes that the true secret of the dream is not its content (the "dream-thoughts"), but the form itself:

> The latent dream-thoughts are the material which the dream-work transforms into the manifest dream . . . The only essential thing about dreams is the dream-work that has influenced the thought-material. We have no right to ignore it in our theory, even though we may disregard it in certain practical situations. Analytic observation shows further that the dream-work never restricts itself to translating these thoughts into the archaic or regressive mode of expression that is familiar to you. In addition, it regularly takes possession of something else, which is not part of the latent thoughts of the previous day, but which is the true motif force for the construction of the dream. This indispensable addition /unentbehrliche Zutat/ is the equally unconscious wish for the fulfillment of which the content of the dream is given its new form. A dream may thus be any sort of thing insofar as you are only taking into account the thoughts it represents—a warning, an intention, a preparation, and so on; but it is always also the fulfillment of an unconscious wish and, if you are considering it as a product of the dream-work, it is only that. A dream is therefore never simply an intention, or a warning, but always an intention, etc., translated into the archaic mode of thought by the help of an unconscious wish and transformed to fulfill that wish. The one characteristic, the wish-fulfillment, is the invariable one; the other may vary. It may for its part once more be a wish, in which case the dream will, with the help of an unconscious wish, represent as fulfilled a latent wish of the previous day.[33]

Every detail is worth analyzing in this brilliant passage, from its implicit opening motto "what is good enough for practice—namely the search for the meaning of dreams—is not good enough for theory," to its concluding redoubling of the wish. Its key insight is, of course, the "triangulation" of latent dream-thought, manifest dream-content and the unconscious wish, which limits the scope of—or, rather, directly undermines—the hermeneutic model of the interpretations of dreams (the path from the manifest dream-content to its hidden meaning, the latent dream-thought), which runs backwards

the path of the formation of a dream (the transposition of the latent dream-thought into the manifest dream-content by the dream-work). The paradox is that this dream-work is not merely a process of masking the dream's "true message": the dream's true core, its unconscious wish, inscribes itself only through and in this very process of masking, so that the moment we re-translate the dream-content back into the dream-thought expressed in it, we lose the "true motif force" of the dream—in short, it is the process of masking itself that inscribes into the dream its true secret. One should therefore turn around the standard notion of the deeper-and-deeper penetration to the core of the dream: it is not that we first penetrate from the manifest dream-content to the first-level secret, the latent dream-thought, and then, in a step further, even deeper, to the dream's unconscious core, the unconscious wish. The "deeper" wish is located into the very gap between the latent dream-thought and manifest dream-content.

So, back to *Erwartung*: in a strictly homologous way, the *Wegrand*-motif is not the unconscious element, but the "dream-thought" of the piece. The actual Unconscious dwells elsewhere—where, exactly? In the form of the music itself. The gap between form and content is here properly dialectical, in contrast to the transcendental gap whose point is that every content appears within an *a priori* formal frame, and hence we should always be aware of the invisible transcendental frame that "constitutes" the content we perceive—or, in structural terms, we should distinguish between the elements and the formal places these elements occupy. We only attain the level of proper dialectical analysis of a form when we conceive a certain formal procedure not as expressing a certain aspect of the (narrative) content, but as marking or signaling that part of the content that is excluded from the explicit narrative line, so that—and herein resides the proper theoretical point—if we want to reconstruct "all" of the narrative content, we must reach beyond the explicit narrative content as such, and include those formal features that act as a stand-in for the "repressed" aspect of the content. To take the well-known elementary example from the analysis of melodramas: the emotional excess that cannot express itself directly in the narrative line finds its outlet in the ridiculously sentimental musical accompaniment or in other formal features.

There is, however, a key difference between melodrama and *Erwartung*: in the latter, the very gap between content and form is to be reflected back into the content itself, as an indication that the content is not all, that something was repressed/excluded from it—this exclusion which establishes the form itself is the "primordial repression" (*Ur-Verdrängung*), and no matter how much we bring out all the repressed content, this primordial repression persists. In other words, what is repressed in a cheap melodrama (and what then returns in the music) is simply the sentimental excess of its content, while what is repressed in *Erwartung*, its Unconscious, is not some determinate content but the void of subjectivity itself that eludes the musical form and is as such constituted by it, as its remainder.

Notes

1. Quoted from Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Early Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 45.
2. Quoted from G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*. Available at http://socserv. mcmaster.ca/~econ/ugcm/3ll3/hegel/history.pdf. Accessed December 16, 2013.
3. Taruskin, 2010, 327.
4. J. P. Hodin, *Edvard Munch* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1972), 88–9.
5. Claudia L. Friedlander, "Man sieht den Weg nicht . . . Musical, Cultural, and Psychoanalytic Signposts Along the Dark Path of Schoenberg's *Erwartung* Op. 17," available online at http://liberatedvoice.typepad.com/clferwartung.pdf.
6. Rory Braddell, "Schoenberg and Atonality . . . An Undergraduate Essay." http://homepage.tinet.ie/~braddellr/schoenberg.htm. Accessed December 16, 2013.
7. Taruskin, 2010, 306.
8. Ibid., 330.
9. Ibid., 307.
10. Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (New York: Norton, 2006), 434–435.
11. Jacques Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 82.
12. Ibid., 83.
13. Gary Tomlison, *Metaphysical Song* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999), 94.
14. Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), 35.
15. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the infamous fourth movement. In one of his essays, Adorno mentions a wonderful example of the vulgarity of *Halbbildung*: an American manual that should help people recognize the best-known classical music pieces and thus avoid embarrassment in intellectual society—how? The author proposes for each best-known classical melody words (allegedly illustrating its "content"), which should help us remember it—the four notes motif at the beginning of Beethoven's Fifth is thus rendered/translated as "Hear how fate knocks! Here how fate knocks!" the main melodic line of the first movement of Tchaikovsky's Sixth as "the storm is over, Tchaikovsky's calm but sad again." Adorno, of course, explodes with rage (obviously mixed with extreme obscene enjoyment) at this barbarism. The problem with the fourth movement of Beethoven's Ninth, which sets to music Schiller's ode about the brotherhood of all men, is that, in it (or in its first part, at least), he *does* this to himself: Schiller's words effectively function as precisely such a vulgar reminder of the "deep" content.
16. Taruskin, 2010, 704.
17. Charles Rosen, *Schoenberg*, (London: Fontana/Collins, 1975), 42.
18. David Horwitz, *Shostakovich Symphonies and Concertos* (Milwaukee: Amadeus Press, 2006), 25.
19. Rosen, 1975, 29–30.
20. Ibid., 95–6.
21. Ibid., 66.
22. The problem of serialism, of the equality of all variations and the hidden focus of the entire matrix can be illustrated through a stupid incident that happened in Slovenia in a hippie commune at the end of 1960s, at the height of the sexual revolution. A "coordinator" of the commune (its *de facto* master, though masters were prohibited) proposed that, in order to break out of the bourgeois individualism in

the matters of sex, one should establish a complex matrix of variations of sexual partners, so that, in a well-determined period of time, every man in the group will have sex with every woman. However, the group soon discovered that the "coordinator" imposed this complex matrix for one purpose only: he wanted to sleep with a particular girl, the partner of another member of the commune, and this matrix appeared to him as the only way to arrive at his goal without admitting his individual preference and desire for possession.

23. Another procedure with a similar function is, of course, the use of *Klangfarbenmelodie*—color-of-the-sound-melody, a technique that involves splitting a musical line or melody between several instruments, rather than assigning it to just one instrument (or set of instruments), thereby adding color (timbre) and texture to the melodic line. (The term was coined by Schoenberg in his *Harmonielehre* from 1911.)

24. Taruskin, 2010, 310.

25. Ibid., 340.

26. Rosen, 1975, 53.

27. Burnett James, *The Music of Jean Sibelius*, (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983), 77.

28. Ibid., 75.

29. Taruskin, 2010, 353.

30. The first one to draw attention to Schoenberg's recycling of the material from "*Am Wegrand*" was Herbert Buchanan in his "A Key to Schoenberg's *Erwartung* Opus 17" (1967).

31. Do we not find something similar in *24*? Almost one-third of each installment is spent on commercials that break up the show. The way commercials break the continuity of the narrative is in itself unique and contributes to the sense of urgency: a single installment, commercials included, lasts exactly one hour, so that commercial breaks are part of the one-hour temporal continuity of the series. Say we see the on-screen digital clock signaling it is "07:46," then there is a commercial break, then we return to the series with the same digital clock signaling that it is now "07:51"—the length of the break in our, spectators', real time is exactly equivalent to the temporal gap in the on-screen narrative, as if the commercial breaks miraculously fit into the real-time deployment of the events, i.e., as if we take a break from the events that nonetheless *go on* while we are watching commercials, as if a live-transmission was temporarily interrupted. It is thus as if the continuity of the ongoing action is so pressing and urgent, spilling over into the real time of the spectator itself, that it cannot even be interrupted for the commercial breaks.

32. Friedlander.

33. Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), 261–262.

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